

CHAPTER 10



The Maltese Falcon

THE HOLLYWOOD STUDIO SYSTEM, 1930–1945



Follow the Fleet

Between 1930 and 1945, the United States economy nearly collapsed. In 1932, as the Great Depression was entering its depths, unemployment reached 23.6 percent. The dollar's buying power was high—admission at some local movie theaters might be only a dime—but many people could afford only necessities.

The stock market hit its lowest level in mid-1932, just before the presidential election, and Franklin Roosevelt swept to the first of four victories by blaming the disaster on Herbert Hoover. Roosevelt's administration moved to bolster the economy. The National Recovery Administration, established in 1933, cast a lenient eye on big-business practices, such as trusts and oligopolies, while also displaying a new tolerance of labor unions. Both policies had a major impact on Hollywood. The government also fostered economic growth by financing roads, buildings, the arts, and other areas under the Works Progress Administration (WPA; established in 1935). The WPA put 8.5 million people back to work, thus building up buying power and helping industries recuperate.

Recovery was uneven. A recession during 1937 and 1938, though less severe than the original crisis, caused similar problems. By 1938, however, government intervention was pulling the country out of the Depression. The outbreak of war in parts of Europe accelerated that process.

Although the United States remained neutral until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, armaments companies were allowed to sell abroad beginning in November 1939. America declared itself "the arsenal of democracy," selling arms to its allies around the world and then building up its own combat capability. This increased manufacturing gradually absorbed the available labor force. Although there were 3 million unemployed when the United States entered the war in 1941, by late in the war some jobs remained unfilled.

The war expanded the American economy. Between 1940 and 1944, the output of manufactured goods quadrupled. Fully 40 percent of the nation's gross national product supported the war effort, but the newly employed workers on the home front (including many who had been housewives or servants) gained purchasing power and a higher standard of living. Despite shortages of some products, most American industries increased their sales, often by 50 percent or more. The film industry shared in this wartime boom, as movie theater attendance rose dramatically.

THE NEW STRUCTURE OF THE FILM INDUSTRY

During the silent era, the Hollywood film industry had developed into an oligopoly in which a small number of companies cooperated to close the market to competition. While the structure of this oligopoly remained relatively stable into the 1930s, the coming of sound and the onset of the Depression caused some changes.

Only one large new company was formed as a result of the coming of sound: RKO, created to exploit RCA's sound system, Photophone. Fox's successful innovation of sound-on-film led it to expand considerably during the late 1920s, but the beginning of the Depression forced Fox to cut back on its investments. Most notably, it sold its newly acquired controlling interest in First National to Warner Bros. Thus Warners, which had been a small company, grew into one of the largest firms of the 1930s.

By 1930, the Hollywood oligopoly had settled into a structure that would change little for nearly twenty years. Eight large companies dominated the industry. First were the Big Five, also called the *Majors*. In order of size, they were Paramount (formerly Famous Players-Lasky), Loew's (generally known by the name of its production subsidiary, MGM), Fox (which became 20th Century-Fox in 1935), Warner Bros., and RKO. To be a Major, a company had to be vertically integrated, owning a theater chain and having an international distribution operation. Smaller companies with few or no theaters formed Little Three, or the *Minors*: Universal, Columbia, and United Artists (UA). There were also several independent firms. Some of these (such as Samuel Goldwyn and David O. Selznick) made expensive, or "A," pictures comparable to those of the Majors. The firms (such as Republic and Monogram) making only inexpensive "B" pictures were collectively known as *Poverty Row*. We shall survey each of

the Majors and Minors briefly and then look at independent production.

The Big Five

Paramount Paramount began as a distribution firm and expanded by buying up large numbers of theaters (pp. 57 and 125). This strategy succeeded in the 1920s, but once the Depression hit, the company earned far less money and owed sizable amounts on the mortgages of its theaters. As a result, Paramount declared bankruptcy in 1933 and underwent court-ordered reorganization until 1935. During that time it produced films but at a loss. In 1936, Paramount theater executive Barney Balaban became president of the entire company and made it profitable again (so successfully that he retained his post until 1964).

In the early 1930s, Paramount was known partly for its European-style productions. Josef von Sternberg made his exotic Marlene Dietrich films there, Ernst Lubitsch continued to add a sophisticated touch with his comedies, and French import Maurice Chevalier was one of its major stars. The studio also depended heavily on radio and vaudeville comedians. The Marx Brothers made their earliest, most bizarre films there (notably *Duck Soup*, directed by Leo McCarey in 1933), and Mae West's suggestive dialogue attracted both audiences and controversy.

In the second half of the decade, Balaban turned Paramount in a more mainstream direction. Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, consistently among the top box-office attractions of the World War II period, helped sustain the studio, as did tough guy Alan Ladd and comedian Betty Hutton. One of the studio's popular wartime directors, Preston Sturges, made several satirical comedies. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Cecil B. De Mille continued as a mainstay of the studio he had helped start, with a series of big-budget historical films.

Loew's/MGM Unlike Paramount, MGM did well all the way through the period from 1930 to 1945. With a smaller theater chain, it had fewer debts and was the most profitable American film firm. This was partly due to the quiet guidance of Nicholas Schenck, who managed Loew's from New York. Louis B. Mayer ran the West Coast studio on a policy of high-profile, big-budget films (supervised by Irving Thalberg until his early death in 1936), backed up by mid-range films (mostly supervised by Harry Rapf) and B pictures.

MGM's films (even the Bs) often looked more luxurious than those of other studios. Budgets for features averaged \$500,000 (significantly more than the \$400,000 Paramount and 20th Century-Fox were spending). Cedric Gibbons, head of the art department, helped create an MGM look with large, white, brightly lit sets. MGM boasted that it had under contract "more stars than there are in heaven." Important directors who worked consistently for MGM included George Cukor and Vincente Minnelli.

In the early 1930s, MGM's biggest star was the unglamorous Marie Dressler, remembered today mainly for her Oscar-winning performance in *Min and Bill* (1930) and her sardonic role in *Dinner at Eight* (1933). Later in the decade, Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy, Mickey Rooney, and Judy Garland became major drawing cards. It is a measure of MGM's emphasis on quality that Rooney, who was in A musicals like Busby Berkeley's *Strike Up the Band* (1940), could simultaneously be delegated to the relatively low-budget, but popular, "Andy Hardy" series. Greta Garbo was more a prestige star than a box-office draw in the United States, but her films did well in Europe; once the war broke out and European markets were closed to American films, MGM let her go. During the war, new stars emerged for the studio, including Greer Garson, Gene Kelly, and Katharine Hepburn—the last teaming up with Spencer Tracy.

20th Century-Fox Partly as a result of its expansion after the innovation of sound, Fox entered the Depression in worse shape than the other Majors. The company remained in trouble until 1933, when Sidney Kent, former head of distribution for Paramount, took over and helped turn the firm around. One crucial step was a merger with a smaller company, Twentieth Century, in 1935. This deal brought in Darryl F. Zanuck as head of the West Coast studio, which he ran with an iron hand.

20th Century-Fox had relatively few long-term stars. Folk humorist Will Rogers was immensely popular up to his death in 1935; skating star Sonja Henie and singer Alice Faye were both famous for a few years. But the studio's biggest draw was child-star Shirley Temple, who topped national box-office polls from 1935 to 1938. Her popularity waned as she grew up, and 20th Century-Fox's biggest wartime profits came instead from Betty Grable musicals. (A photograph of Grable in a bathing suit was the favorite pin up among the troops.) Major directors who worked steadily at Fox during this period included Henry King and John Ford.

Warner Bros. Like Fox, Warner Bros. had been borrowing and expanding just before the Depression began. It coped with its debts not by declaring bankruptcy but by selling off some holdings and cutting costs. Harry Warner ran the company from New York, insisting on making a relatively large number of low-budget projects, resulting in modest but predictable profits.

The effects on the films were apparent. Although in total assets Warners was as big as MGM, its sets were much smaller, and its stable of popular actors—James Cagney, Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart, Errol Flynn, and others—worked in more films. Plots were recycled frequently (the screenwriting department was known as the "echo chamber"), and the studio concentrated on creating popular genres and then mining them: the Busby Berkeley musical, the gangster film, the problem film based on current headlines, the "bio-pic," and, once the war began, a series of successful combat films. Warners depended on prolific, solid directors such as William Wellman, Michael Curtiz, and Mervyn LeRoy to keep the releases flowing. The many Warners films of the era that have become classics attest to the ability of the studio's filmmakers to succeed with limited resources.

RKO This was the shortest-lived of the Majors. In 1928, the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), unable to convince any studio to adopt its sound system, went into the movie-making business itself as RKO (p. 174). RKO always lagged behind the other Majors. By 1933 the firm was in bankruptcy, and it was not reorganized until 1940. At that point, the general wartime prosperity helped RKO achieve profitability, though its problems would return shortly after the war's end.

RKO had no stable policy during this period, and it lacked big stars. Katharine Hepburn, for example, was popular during the early 1930s, but a series of indifferent and eccentric films labeled her "box-office poison." RKO had isolated hits, such as the 1933 fantasy *King Kong*, but its only consistent moneymakers during the 1930s were Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, whose series of musicals ran from 1934 to 1938. To a considerable extent, RKO's slim profits depended on its distribution of animated films made by an independent firm, Walt Disney.

During the early 1940s, RKO turned to adapting prestigious Broadway plays, including *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (1940). It also hired controversial young theatrical producer Orson Welles. His *Citizen Kane* (1941) came to be remembered as the most important RKO film, though it was financially disappointing at the time. During the early 1940s, RKO's B unit, supervised by Val Lewton, produced some of the most creative low-budget films of Hollywood's studio era.

THE HAYS CODE: SELF-CENSORSHIP IN HOLLYWOOD

The popular image of Will Hays and other officials of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) casts them as sour puritans imposing censorship on the film industry. The reality is more complex. The MPPDA was a corporation owned jointly by the film companies themselves. One of the MPPDA's tasks was to help avoid official censorship from the outside.

The MPPDA was formed in 1922 to improve public relations after a series of Hollywood scandals, to provide a lobbying link to the era's sympathetic Republican administrations, and to handle foreign problems like quotas. Similar functions continued into the 1930s, but the MPPDA became more famous for its policy of industry self-censorship: the Production Code (often called the Hays Code).

The early 1930s were an age of conservatism. Many believed that lax morality during the 1920s Jazz Age had been one cause of the Depression. State and municipal film censorship boards, formed in the silent era, tightened standards. Pressure groups promoting religious beliefs, children's welfare, and the like protested against sex, violence, and other types of subject matter. In 1932 and 1933, a series of studies by the Payne Fund investigated the effects of filmgoing on audiences—particularly children.

By early 1930, outside pressure for censorship forced the MPPDA to adopt the Production Code as industry policy. The Code was an outline of moral standards governing the depiction of crime, sex, violence, and other controversial subjects. Provisions of the Code demanded, for example, that “methods of crime should not be explicitly presented” and that “sexual perversion or any inference to it is forbidden.” (In this period, “sexual perversion” referred primarily to homosexuality.) All Hollywood films were expected to obey the Code or risk local censorship. In enforcing the Code, MPPDA censors often went to absurd

lengths. Even respectably married couples had to be shown sleeping in twin beds (to suit British censors), and the mildest profanity was forbidden. When *Gone with the Wind* was filmed in 1939, there was lengthy controversy before the MPPDA finally permitted Clark Gable to speak his famous departing line “Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.”

The MPPDA's efforts were initially resisted by the film companies. Most of the firms were in financial trouble, some moving into or near bankruptcy as theater attendance fell; they knew sex and violence could boost theater patronage. Gangster films and sex pictures, however, drew the wrath of censors and pressure groups. *The Public Enemy* (1931), *Little Caesar* (1930), and *Scarface* (1932) were seen as glorifying criminals. Although the protagonists were killed in the end, it was feared that youngsters would copy the tough-guy images of James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson. More notoriously, several films centered on women who traded sexual favors for material gain. *Baby Face* (1933) and *Red-Headed Woman* (1932) showed women attaining elegant apartments, clothes, and cars through a series of affairs. Even *Back Street* (1932, John M. Stahl), in which the heroine lives modestly and truly loves the man who keeps her, was found offensive. According to the Code's author, the film approved “of extramarital relationship, thereby reflecting adversely on the institution of marriage and belittling its obligations.”¹

Mae West presented a formidable challenge to the MPPDA. She was a successful Broadway performer and playwright whose fame rested on sensational plays like *Sex* (1926). Although the MPPDA fought to keep her out of films, Paramount, facing bankruptcy, hired her; for a few years, she was the company's top moneymaker. Her first star vehicle, *She Done Him Wrong* (1933, Lowell Sherman),

The Little Three

Universal Although it had an extensive distribution system and was the largest of the Little Three, Universal had constant money problems from 1930 to 1945 (and beyond). It had few major stars, and its successful filmmakers tended to move to bigger studios. Universal's early strategy was to promote new stars in visually striking horror films. The firm made stars of Bela Lugosi (*Dracula*, 1931), Boris Karloff (*Frankenstein*, 1931), and Claude Rains (*The Invisible Man*, 1933). After 1935,

Universal increasingly targeted small-town audiences, building up another new star, the cheerful teenage singer Deanna Durbin. The studio relied on B series, such as the Sherlock Holmes films of the 1940s, starring Basil Rathbone, and the hugely popular slapstick films of Abbott and Costello.

Columbia Under the steady leadership of studio head Harry Cohn, Columbia weathered the Depression and remained profitable. Despite low budgets, it turned out popular films, often by borrowing stars or directors from



10.1 The seal of approval as it appeared in the 1930s at the beginning of films passed by the MPPDA.

took in many times its cost. A typical bit of dialogue occurs as the virtuous young hero chides the heroine, Lou, by asking her, “Haven’t you ever met a man that could make you happy?” Lou replies, “Sure . . . lots of times.” West’s drawling delivery could make any line seem salacious.

The timing of the premiere of *She Done Him Wrong* could not have been worse. The first Payne Fund studies had just appeared. Moreover, in early 1933, the Roosevelt administration took over, severing Hays’s ties to Republican officials in Washington. A national censorship law seemed to be in the offing. As a result, in March 1933, Hays pushed the film industry to enforce the Code.

Still, studios hungry for patrons tested the Code’s limits. Mae West’s films continued to cause problems. *Belle of the Nineties* (1934) was recut at the insistence of the New York State Censorship Board. The negotiations concerning this film coincided with mounting pressure from religious groups, especially the Catholic Legion of Decency. (The legion had a rating system that could condemn films either for young people or for all Catholics. This stigma could cause the industry considerable lost revenues.)

The danger of increased official censorship was too great to be ignored, and, in June 1934, the MPPDA established a new set of rules. Member studios releasing films without MPPDA seals of approval (**10.1**) now had to pay a \$25,000 fine. More important, a film without a seal was barred from any MPPDA member’s theaters—which included most first-run houses. This rule forced most producers to comply with the Code. “Objectionable” material was still used, but it became more indirect. A strategic fade-out might hint that a couple was about to make love; extreme violence could occur offscreen; sophisticated dialogue could suggest much without violating the Code.

The MPPDA may have been repressive, but it blocked potentially more extreme national censorship. In practical terms, the Code was not a tool of the prudish minds of MPPDA officials but a summary of the types of subject matter that could get movies cut by local censors or banned for Catholic viewers. The Code saved Hollywood money by pressuring filmmakers to avoid shooting scenes that would be snipped out. The MPPDA did not seek to eliminate every risqué line or violent moment. Instead, it allowed the studios to go just far enough to titillate the public without crossing the lines defined by local censorship authorities.

bigger studios (thus avoiding the costs of keeping them under contract). The studio’s most important director, Frank Capra, stayed there throughout the 1930s. His 1934 film *It Happened One Night* starred Claudette Colbert (loaned out by Paramount) and Clark Gable (by MGM); film, director, and stars all won Oscars, and the picture was one of Columbia’s biggest hits.

Although several major directors worked briefly at Columbia—most notably John Ford for *The Whole Town’s Talking* (1935), George Cukor for *Holiday* (1938), and

Howard Hawks for *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939) and *His Girl Friday* (1940)—they did not stay. During this period, the studio depended largely on its B Westerns, Three Stooges films, and other cheaper fare.

United Artists The sound era saw the beginning of a slow decline for UA. D. W. Griffith, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks all retired in the early to mid-1930s, and Charles Chaplin released a feature only about once every five years. UA distributed films for other prominent

independent producers such as Alexander Korda, David O. Selznick, Walter Wanger, and Samuel Goldwyn—who all switched to other firms by the end of World War II. As a result, UA was the only company whose profits fell during most of the wartime boom years.

UA's releases from 1930 to 1945 reflect their origins from a batch of diverse independent producers. Prestigious British imports like *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, slapstick musicals with popular Broadway star Eddie Cantor, a few of Alfred Hitchcock's American films (including *Rebecca* and *Spellbound*), and some of William Wyler's finest works (*Dodsworth*, *Wuthering Heights*) provided a varied output. Unlike in the silent period, however, UA now had to fill out its feature schedule with mid-budget, or even B, pictures.

The Independents

There was little real competition among the Majors, the Minors, and the independents. Each group had a different function within the industry. The Majors provided the bulk of the A pictures for big theaters. The Minors supplied the extra films needed to fill out programs and catered to smaller theaters that did not belong to the Majors. A few independent firms made prestige films, while others, like Monogram and Republic, supplied double features with B pictures, most of them Westerns, crime thrillers, and serials.

Some small independent producers were even further removed from the Hollywood mainstream, producing low-budget films for specific ethnic groups. Oscar Micheaux (pp. 143–144) continued making films with black casts. The introduction of sound led to production in a variety of languages. In cities where there were large enclaves of Jewish immigrants, for example, there was a demand for films in Yiddish. While there had been silent films distributed with Yiddish intertitles, the talkies fostered a brief flowering of Jewish-oriented production in the 1930s. Films such as *Uncle Moses* (produced by Yiddish Talking Pictures in 1932) were shown in theaters that also exhibited movies imported from the two other centers of Yiddish filmmaking, the USSR and Poland. Plays from the lively Jewish theater scene were adapted. Edgar G. Ulmer, who had worked briefly in Hollywood, made one of the most internationally successful Yiddish films, *Green Fields* (1937; **10.2**). Like many films in this cycle, it centered on family crises and the clash between traditional values and modern urban life. The films featured frequent musical interludes. The outbreak of World War II crushed Yiddish filmmaking in Poland in 1939, and, by 1942, Yiddish-language production had ceased in the United States as well.



10.2 Ulmer adds visual interest to the low-budget *Green Fields* by placing objects in the foreground to frame the action.

Despite the limited successes of various types of independent production, it would have been virtually impossible for a new company—large or small—to gain a significant share of the film market. The Hollywood firms had created a secure, stable situation in which they loaned one another stars, played one another's films in their theaters, and cooperated in other ways. In one of their most prominent joint actions, they worked through the MPPDA to fight outside pressure for censorship of movies (see box pp. 192–193).

EXHIBITION PRACTICE IN THE 1930s

Sound and the Depression significantly changed the way theaters presented movies. Warner Bros. initially viewed sound as a way of eliminating live orchestral accompaniment of features and stage acts in the theater. Its effort was successful, and by 1930 most theaters showed only filmed entertainment. In effect, creative control of programming had at last been taken entirely out of the hands of local theater managers, who received their complete shows in the form of films.

The Depression cut short the age of the movie palace. Many theaters no longer could afford ushers to show patrons to their seats. Seeking extra income, managers offered candy, popcorn, and beverages in the lobbies. Since many moviegoers had little to spend on entertainment, exhibitors played double and even triple features, in addition to the usual short films. The second film was often a cheap B picture, but it gave the moviegoer a sense of getting twice as much. Just as important, the double feature had an intermission during which the spectator could buy refreshments.

Managers also lured patrons with giveaways. There might be a drawing for a door prize, or a souvenir pillow might come with every ticket. Most effective were “dish nights,” when each ticket came with a piece of chinaware. Families were thus encouraged to attend weekly to collect a whole set of crockery.

As attendance expanded during World War II, some of these incentives declined. B-film production was less important, but the double feature remained, as did the concession stand. Many big movie houses had deteriorated during the Depression, but they were still ready to accommodate the renewed crowds of moviegoers.

CONTINUED INNOVATION IN HOLLYWOOD

During the 1920s, the expansion of the industry had included the formation of many technical companies and studio departments. The innovation of sound, which created such an upheaval in the business, had been one result of this growth in the technological support side of the industry. During the 1930s and 1940s, advances in filmmaking continued. Through the efforts of the studios, key manufacturers, and coordinating institutions like the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, film technology became more versatile and sophisticated.

Sound Recording

Methods of sound recording improved steadily. Early microphones were omnidirectional, picking up unwanted noise from crew and equipment. Gradually, unidirectional microphones, which could be aimed specifically at the desired sound source, were developed. While early booms

to hang and move the microphone above the set had been large and clumsy, lighter booms soon made recording more flexible (10.3). By late 1932, innovations in multiple-track recording permitted music, voices, and sound effects to be registered separately and later mixed onto one track. (Songs were generally recorded first, with the singers moving their lips to a playback.) Also in 1932, identical edge numbers began to be printed on both the image and sound negatives, permitting close synchronization even of short shots.

By 1932, the results of such improvements were apparent in many films. Actors no longer had to move gingerly or to slowly enunciate their dialogue, and the lugubrious pace of many early talkies gave way to a livelier rhythm. The new flexibility in sound recording is apparent in such disparate films of 1932 as *Trouble in Paradise* (Ernst Lubitsch), *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (Mervyn LeRoy), and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Rouben Mamoulian).

While early sound films had often avoided using much nondiegetic atmospheric music, multiple-track recording fostered the introduction of what came to be called the *symphonic score*, in which lengthy musical passages played under the action and dialogue. Several composers who were trained in the tradition of post-Romantic European classical music, including Max Steiner, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Miklós Rózsa, David Raksin, and Bernard Herrmann, wrote scores to heighten moods of romance or suspense.



10.3 A lightweight boom aims a small microphone directly at the actors during production of Lloyd Bacon's *San Quentin* (1937). Note the padded metal blimp enclosing the camera.



10.4 The crane Busby Berkeley used at Warner Bros. to film elaborate musical numbers, seen here between takes of *Wonder Bar* (1934).

Steiner in particular helped establish the norms for studio music. His emphatic score for *King Kong* (1933) was an influential early use of the symphonic approach. Steiner also commonly quoted easily recognizable tunes to emphasize a scene's meaning, as in *Sergeant York* (1940), where "Give Me That Old Time Religion" forms a motif associated with the hero's religious faith. Like many musical techniques in the sound cinema, this quotation practice derived from live accompaniment of silent films. Composers usually tried to make the music unobtrusive; like continuity editing, set design, and other techniques, most music was supposed to serve the narrative without drawing attention to itself.

Camera Movement

Many early sound films contained camera movements, but to execute them, filmmakers often had to shoot silent and add sound later or try to move the bulky camera booth. Moving shots tended to stand out from the rest of the film, which might well be made with multiple cameras. Such disparities were not good for continuity. Once camera blimps came into use (see 9.12 and 10.3), a new problem surfaced: the cameras were too heavy for traditional tripods, and they were difficult to move between shots. The solution was a strong, mobile camera support, and individual cinematographers and service firms created new versions of the sorts of dollies and cranes used at the end of the silent era.

Again, 1932 was a breakthrough year, with the introduction of the Bell & Howell Rotambulator. This was a

700-pound dolly that could raise the camera vertically from 18 inches to 7 feet, and the operator could pan, tilt, or track with ease. The Fearless Company's compact Panoram Dolly (1936) could pass through a 36-inch doorway. The spectacular tracking shots of some late 1930s and 1940s films, where the camera traverses two or more rooms of a set, depended on such equipment.

Craning movements also became more common. Universal's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1931) used the giant 50-foot crane that had been built in 1929 for *Broadway*. The famous shot of pulling back above a huge railway platform full of wounded Confederate soldiers in *Gone with the Wind* employed a building crane. Large cranes could also be used in the studio, usually to create spectacular shots in historical epics, musicals, or fantasies (10.4). In MGM's 1939 musical fantasy *The Wizard of Oz*, the camera swooped over the Munchkin City and the Yellow Brick Road. Most cranes, however, were small models suitable for unobtrusive vertical and diagonal movements.

Technicolor

Undoubtedly the most striking innovation of this era was color filmmaking. We have seen how silent films employed various nonphotographic processes that colored the film after it had been shot. There were also several attempts to introduce photographic color processes in the silent period. The Technicolor firm's two-strip system had been used occasionally in Hollywood films during the 1920s,

and it survived into the early sound era. It was costly to use, however, and it rendered colors mainly as pinkish orange and greenish blue (**Color Plate 10.1**).

In the early 1930s, the firm introduced a new system, so-called three-strip Technicolor. It involved attaching colored filters and prisms to the camera. The light coming into the camera lens was split and recorded on three strips of black-and-white film. One strip registered red values in the spectrum, another green, and another blue. Positive images for each strip were then made and treated with colored dyes. On a fresh strip of film, gelatin on the surface absorbed the dyes, blending to create the original color of the scene. Having been separated from their source, the colors were combined by being absorbed into the surface of the film. (This made Technicolor prints slightly thicker than black-and-white ones.) The result was a very saturated color image.

Three-strip Technicolor was introduced publicly in a 1932 Disney short cartoon, *Flowers and Trees*. Pioneer Pictures, a small independent production firm owned by a major stockholder in Technicolor, produced a live-action musical short, *La Cucaracha*, in 1935 (**Color Plate 10.2**). It demonstrated that Technicolor could render vivid colors with live actors in the studio. That same year, the feature *Becky Sharp* (**Color Plate 10.3**) showed that color could add to the appeal of a historical drama. Technicolor's ability to produce bright, saturated colors suggested that, for some films, the extra cost (nearly 30 percent higher than that of black-and-white) was justified. (Color Plates 11.1, 15.7, and 15.10 show other examples of three-strip Technicolor.) The Majors began using color, and the Technicolor company monopolized the process, supplying all cameras, providing supervisors for each production, and processing and printing the film.

Today we regard color as a realistic element in films, but in the 1930s and 1940s, it was often associated with fantasy and spectacle. It could be used for exotic adventures like *The Garden of Allah* (1936), swashbucklers like *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1939), or musicals like *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944).

Special Effects

The term *special effects*, used in connection with the 1930s, usually conjures up thoughts of films like *King Kong* and *The Wizard of Oz*. Yet, as the president of the American Society of Cinematographers pointed out in 1943, "Ninety per cent of the trick and special effects shots in Hollywood movies are made with no thought of fooling or mystifying the audience. The great majority of camera trickery is used simply because filming the same action by conventional

means would be too difficult, too expensive, or too dangerous."² Because special effects promoted ease, efficiency, and safety, they were used frequently and had a considerable influence on films of this period.

Most trick photography in the silent era was done by the cinematographer during shooting. Multiple-camera filming and other complications associated with sound led to trick work's becoming the responsibility of specialists. Studios added special-effects departments that often invented and built equipment to meet the demands of specific scenes.

Special-effects work usually involved combining separately shot images in one of two ways: through *rear projection* (also called back projection) or *optical printing*. In back projection, the actors perform in a studio set as an image filmed earlier is projected onto a screen behind them (**10.5**). In most scenes in which characters ride in cars, for example, the vehicle is filmed in a studio while the background landscape passes on a screen (**10.6**). Back projection saved money, since actors and crew did not have to go on location. (A small crew, or *second unit*, would travel to make the back-projection shots.) For example, much of the 1938 MGM film *Captains Courageous* took place on the deck of a fishing schooner, yet the actors worked entirely in the studio, with a tank of water below them and back-projected seascapes.

The optical printer offered more options for rephotographing and combining images. Essentially, an optical printer consisted of a projector aimed into the lens of a camera. Both could be moved forward and backward, different lenses could be substituted, and portions of the image could be masked off and the film reexposed. Images could be superimposed, or portions could be joined like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle; a single image could be enlarged or its speed altered.

Typically the optical printer was used to save money by filling in portions of studio sets. By blocking off a part of a frame with a *matte*, the cinematographer could leave an unexposed portion into which the special-effects expert could later insert a *matte painting* (**10.7**).

Far more complex were *traveling mattes*. Here the effects cinematographer would make two or more masks for each frame of the trick passage and expose the film twice, frame by frame, using complementary masks in turn to cover portions of the film. Traveling mattes were commonly used to make *wipes*, where a line passes across the screen, removing one shot gradually as the next appears. In 1933, wipes became fashionable as a way of replacing *fades* or *dissolves* (two other transitional techniques) when RKO optical-printer expert Linwood Dunn created elaborate transitions, moving in fan, sawtooth,



10.5 The actors in *The Woman in Red* (1935) sit in front of a back-projection screen, upper left, on which an ocean background will be projected during filming.



10.6 This scene from Fritz Lang's 1936 film *Fury* uses rear projection.



10.7 Only the lower left portion of this shot from *Queen Christina* (1932) was built on the studio backlot; the ships, water, rooftops, and sky were added with a matte painting.

and other shapes, in *Melody Cruise* and *Flying Down to Rio* (10.8).

The optical printer was often used to create *montage sequences*. These brief flurries of shots used superimpositions, calendar pages, newspaper headlines, and similar images to suggest the passage of time or the course of a lengthy action (10.9).

There were many other types of special effects. Entire scenes could be filmed using miniatures, as in the plane takeoffs and landings in Hawks's *Only Angels Have Wings*. Frame-by-frame three-dimensional animation was used occasionally, most notably to turn small puppets into the giant ape in *King Kong*. Other tricks involved simple mechanical devices, like the trapdoor elevator and dry-ice fumes that make the Wicked Witch seem to melt in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Cinematography Styles

During the early 1930s, most cinematographers aimed for a “soft” image, based on the important stylistic trend of the 1920s (p. 128). Now, however, the soft look became less extreme but more pervasive. Camera experts used fewer obvious filters or smeared, distorting glass masks. Instead, studio laboratories typically processed film to make it look grayer and softer. Moreover, in 1931, Eastman Kodak introduced a Super Sensitive Panchromatic stock for use with the more diffused incandescent lighting necessitated by the innovation of sound (owing to



10.8 A wipe with a zigzag edge provides a transition from one shot to another in *Flying Down to Rio*.



10.9 In *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, superimposed newspaper headlines create montage sequences summarizing the public's changing attitude toward of the protagonist.



10.10 In *A Farewell to Arms* (1932, Frank Borzage), the romantic scene in which the main characters fall in love consists of soft, glittering images.



10.11 *Shanghai Express* (1932, Josef von Sternberg) employs an extensive range of soft grays to create glamorous images of Marlene Dietrich.

the hiss emitted by arc lamps). Some films used a sparkling, low-contrast image to convey a sense of glamor or romance (10.10). Others went for a clearer focus while still avoiding sharp blacks and whites (10.11).

Most Hollywood filmmakers of the 1930s clustered actors together in a relatively shallow area and then cut among them using shot/reverse shot. Others created compositions in greater depth, sometimes with the foreground plane slightly out of focus (10.12) but sometimes also using deep focus (10.13, 10.14). (Such depth had precedents in the silent era; compare with 7.48.)

Director Orson Welles and cinematographer Gregg Toland took such deep-focus shots further and used them extensively in *Citizen Kane* (1941). Many of *Kane*'s depth shots used optical printing to combine sharply focused planes that had been filmed separately. Some shots, however, placed foreground elements near the lens and background elements at a considerable distance, yet kept everything in sharp focus; this occurs most spectacularly in the long take of the contract-signing scene (10.15). Welles went further in his second film, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), for which cinematographer Stanley Cortez achieved many crisply focused depth shots without using trick photography (10.16). The influence of these visually innovative films soon spread throughout the industry. Staging in widely separated planes with deep focus became common practice (10.17).

Overall, technological innovations of the era from 1930 to 1945 did not fundamentally change the classical Hollywood approach to filmmaking. Narrative action and



10.12 A depth composition in *Twentieth Century* (1934, Howard Hawks).

character psychology remained central, and continuity rules still aided spatial orientation. Sound, color, deep focus, and other techniques enhanced the style.

MAJOR DIRECTORS

In addition to the established directors working in Hollywood, the introduction of sound brought an influx of stage directors into the film studios; during this era, several screenwriters also joined the ranks of film directors. Moreover, the troubled political situation in Europe brought several émigrés' talents to the United States.

The Silent Veterans

Charles Chaplin opposed talking pictures. As his own producer and a phenomenally popular star, he could go on

CHAPTER 15



The Lady in the Lake

AMERICAN CINEMA IN THE POSTWAR ERA, 1945–1960



Sunset Blvd.

The United States came out of World War II a prosperous country. Workers had earned good money in military industries but had had little chance to spend it. Returning troops rejoined their spouses or married, ready to set up households and buy consumer goods. The birthrate, increasing during the war, skyrocketed, and the new generation was tagged the “baby boom.”

The United States took on the role of a world superpower, helping its allies and former enemies. At the same time, the USSR struggled to assert its authority. President Truman adopted a policy of “containment,” trying to counter Soviet influence throughout the world. From 1950 to 1953, the United States fought alongside South Korean troops against the Communist North in an indecisive civil war. The United States and the USSR jockeyed for influence over nonaligned nations. The Cold War between the United States and the USSR would last for almost fifty years.

The sense of Communist encroachment around the world led to an era of political suspicion in the United States. During the late 1940s, intelligence agencies investigated individuals suspected of spying or subversion. A congressional committee delved into Communist infiltration of government and business, and under President Dwight Eisenhower (1953–1961) a Cold War policy held sway.

Yet, even as the US government sought to present a united front against Communism, American society seemed to fracture into distinct demographic segments. One powerful group was composed of teenagers, who had money to buy cars, records, clothes, and movie tickets. As teenage crime rose, the image of the “juvenile delinquent” emerged as well. Other social groups also gained prominence. The civil rights movement accelerated, primarily under the guidance of pacifist Martin Luther King, Jr. In 1954, the Supreme Court decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* took a step toward ending legal discrimination by mandating school desegregation.

POSTWAR CHANGES, 1946–1948

During the three years immediately after the war's end, Hollywood experienced pivotal high points and low points. Movie admissions had been increasing during the war, and 1946 set a box-office record: over \$1.6 billion in US and Canadian ticket sales. This figure, equivalent to over \$20 billion in 2018, remains unsurpassed. On average, every week 80 to 90 million Americans went to movies, out of a population of 140 million. (In 2016, the weekly average was 25 million out of more than 300 million.)

Nonetheless, despite delirious box-office figures, Hollywood firms confronted serious problems over the next two years. In 1947, anti-Communist investigations by the US government targeted numerous studio personnel, and a legal decision that would help change the very structure of the industry was handed down in 1948.

The HUAC Hearings: The Cold War Reaches Hollywood

During the 1930s, many Hollywood intellectuals had been sympathetic to Soviet Communism; some had even joined the American Communist Party. Their left-wing leanings had been reinforced during World War II, when the Soviet Union was one of America's allies in the battle against the Axis. It was not illegal to join the Party, but members were suspected of siding with an enemy of the United States. For years the FBI had compiled information on Communists or sympathizers in the Hollywood community. By 1947, Congress was investigating Communist activities in the United States as part of the nationwide search by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) for purportedly subversive elements in government and private life.

In May 1947, several individuals—among them the actor Adolphe Menjou and the director Leo McCarey—agreed in secret interviews with congressional representatives that they would name Hollywood people with Communist ties. In September, Republican J. Parnell Thomas chaired a HUAC hearing that set out to prove that the Screen Writers' Guild was dominated by Communists. Forty-three witnesses were subpoenaed.

The “friendly” witnesses, led off by Jack Warner of Warner Bros., labeled several screenwriters Communists. Gary Cooper, Ronald Reagan, Robert Taylor, and other stars expressed concern over leftist content in scripts. The “unfriendly” witnesses, most of them screenwriters, were seldom allowed to state their views. Most avoided denying that they had been Communists, stressing instead that the First Amendment guaranteed them freedom of

expression in their work. Ten who testified were cited for contempt of Congress and briefly jailed. German leftist Bertolt Brecht, who had been working in Hollywood during the war and who had never belonged to any Communist party, gave a neutral response and immediately left for East Germany.

Vociferous public protest led Congress to suspend the hearings for four years. The ten unfriendly witnesses who had testified, however, found their careers collapsing as producers blacklisted them. Most of the “Hollywood Ten”—scriptwriters John Howard Lawson, Dalton Trumbo, Albert Maltz, Alvah Bessie, Samuel Ornitz, Herbert Biberman, Ring Lardner, Jr., and Lester Cole; director Edward Dmytryk; and producer Adrian Scott—were unable to work openly in the film industry.

The 1947 HUAC hearings found that the subject matter of Hollywood films had been tainted by Communist ideas—hence the emphasis on screenwriters. In 1951, the committee resumed its hearings, now aiming to expose all allegedly Communist personnel. Actors Sterling Hayden and Edward G. Robinson, directors Edward Dmytryk and Elia Kazan, and other former Communist sympathizers saved themselves by naming others. People who were named but refused to cooperate, such as actress Gale Sondergaard, found themselves on a new blacklist.

Some of the blacklisted filmmakers saved their careers by going abroad. Director Joseph Losey moved to England and Jules Dassin to France. Others worked under pseudonyms. In 1956, Dalton Trumbo wrote the script for *The Brave One*, which won him an Oscar—under a false name. In 1960, Otto Preminger declared that he would give Trumbo screen credit for the script of *Exodus*, and producer Kirk Douglas did the same for Trumbo's contribution to *Spartacus* (1960). From that point, the blacklist slowly crumbled. Only about one-tenth of its victims, however, were able to resume their film careers. The HUAC hearings had left a legacy of distrust and wasted talent. The resentment felt toward those who had given names during the hearings lingered for decades, resurfacing when Kazan was awarded a lifetime achievement Oscar in 2000.

The Paramount Decision

As we saw in Chapters 3 and 7, from 1912 on, the Hollywood studios had expanded to create an oligopoly. Working together, the firms controlled the industry. The largest were vertically integrated—making films, distributing them, and showing them in their own theater chains. They benefited from this guaranteed outlet for their

products and from a fairly predictable income. The smaller companies also benefited, since their films could fill in the free time in these theaters. The big firms could block-book whole packages of films to theaters they did not own, letting the bigger-budget, star-studded items carry the weaker pictures. During the sound era, the eight main Hollywood firms had continued to keep any large competitor from entering the film business.

Almost from the beginning, the US government had investigated this situation. In 1938, the Justice Department initiated a suit, *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc. et al.*, usually called the "Paramount case." It accused the Big Five (Paramount, Warner Bros., Loew's/MGM, 20th Century-Fox, and RKO), and the Little Three (Universal, Columbia, and United Artists [UA]), of violating antitrust laws by colluding to monopolize the film business. The Big Five owned theater chains, block-booked films, and used other unfair means to keep independent films out of the big first-run houses. The Little Three owned no theaters, but they were accused of cooperating to exclude other firms from the market.

After a complex series of decisions, appeals, and legal maneuvers, in 1948 the US Supreme Court declared that the eight companies had been guilty of monopolistic practices. The Court ordered the Majors to divest themselves of their theater chains. It also directed the eight Hollywood firms to end block-booking and other practices that hampered independent exhibitors. The Hollywood companies filed a series of consent decrees that set up compromises with the Court. Over the next decade, all eight moved to comply with the Court's orders. The Big Five remained production-distribution companies but sold off their theater chains.

Some obvious benefits resulted from the increase in competition. With block booking outlawed, exhibitors were free to fill part or all of their programs with independent films. Given this new access to exhibitors, independent producers multiplied. Stars and directors broke away to start their own companies. Between 1946 and 1956, the annual number of independent films more than doubled, to about 150. UA, which existed solely to distribute independent films, released 50 a year.

The production wing of the industry had been protected the most by the lack of competition in the pre-1948 era. The Paramount decision's ban on block booking meant that a producer could no longer count on a few strong films to carry the rest. Every film had to appeal to exhibitors on its own. As a result, studios concentrated on fewer but more expensive films. With access to larger theaters, the small studios could compete better by making

bigger-budget films. Among these were Universal's Technicolor biopic *The Glenn Miller Story* (1954, Anthony Mann) and Columbia's all-star *From Here to Eternity* (1953, Fred Zinnemann).

The eight main companies still dominated distribution. Independent producers could not afford to start large distribution circuits with offices in cities around the country. With little competition among distributors, almost all the independent firms had to release their films through the eight established companies. By the mid-1950s, nearly all these big firms had many independent productions on their annual release schedules.

In exhibition, independent theaters, which had previously depended on cheap films from small firms, had access to a wider range of films (though competition from television soon drove many out of business). At the same time, they also had to compete with each other for the smaller pool of films being released. Local theaters continued to cooperate among themselves, however, by keeping a geographic separation within a city and limiting the number of theaters in which the same film could play. As a result, theaters historically have not had to compete strongly for moviegoers' business—a fact reflected by today's roughly uniform admission prices among first-run theaters.

As a result, despite all these changes, the Majors and Minors continued to dominate distribution—the most powerful and lucrative wing of the industry—and to reap the bulk of box-office receipts.

THE DECLINE OF THE HOLLYWOOD STUDIO SYSTEM

Just as Hollywood was enjoying the high box-office receipts of 1946, its international market was also expanding. Late in the war, the studios turned the foreign department of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) into a new trade organization, the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA). Its task was to coordinate American exports, negotiate prices, and present a united front for Hollywood firms abroad. The government, seeing cinema as propaganda for American democracy, assisted film export through Commerce Department initiatives and diplomatic pressures.

Many countries passed protectionist laws, establishing quotas, production subsidies, and restrictions on exporting currency. The benefits were ambivalent at best.

In 1947, Britain imposed a tax on imported films, and the MPEAA announced that the Majors would no longer offer new films to the United Kingdom. The boycott succeeded. After eight months, the British government repealed the duty. Protectionist action often strengthened Hollywood's foreign domination. US firms could recover currency earned abroad by investing in foreign films and importing them to America, or they could spend "frozen funds" by shooting films abroad. These *runaway productions* also avoided the high cost of US labor.

While some countries struggled to rebuild their industries domestically, Hollywood came to rely more on exporting its product. Before the war, about one-third of US box-office income had come from abroad, but by the mid-1960s the figure had risen to around half—a proportion that remained constant for decades.

After 1946, however, Hollywood's domestic fortunes began to sag. Attendance steadily shrank, from about 85 million viewers per week in 1946 to about 47 million in 1957. About 4,000 theaters closed during that decade. Output and profits fell. One of the Big Five, RKO, passed through several owners, including Howard Hughes, before ceasing production in 1957.

What ended the golden age of the studios, begun so auspiciously during the 1910s? After the war, the film industry faced a dramatic challenge. As people adopted new lifestyles, television and other leisure-time activities profoundly changed Americans' moviegoing habits.

Changing Lifestyles and Competing Entertainment

During the 1910s and 1920s, theaters had been built near mass-transportation lines in downtown areas easily accessible to local residents and commuters alike. After the war, many Americans had saved enough money for homes and cars. Suburban housing sprang up, and many people now traveled by car to the city center. With small children, however, they hesitated to make the long trip into town for a film. Thus, changing demographics contributed to the late-1940s slump in moviegoing.

Initially, families stayed home and listened to the radio. Within a few years they were watching television. By the end of the 1950s, 90 percent of homes had television. The suburban lifestyle and broadcast entertainment, along with growth in other leisure activities (such as sports and recorded music), made the film industry's receipts plunge by 74 percent between 1947 and 1957.

When suburban couples did decide to go out to the movies, they tended to be more selective than moviegoers in the past. Rather than attending a local theater regularly, they would choose an "important" film—one based on a

famous literary work or distinguished by its stars or displaying lavish production values. As the elimination of block booking pushed producers to make higher-budget films, they concentrated on projects that would cater to the more selective moviegoer.

Wider and More Colorful Movies The television image of the early 1950s was small, indistinct, and black-and-white. Film producers attempted to draw spectators out of their living rooms and back into theaters by changing the look and sound of their movies.

Color was an obvious way to differentiate movies from television, and, during the early 1950s, the proportion of Hollywood color films jumped from 20 to 50 percent. Many employed Technicolor, the elaborate three-strip, dye-transfer process perfected in the 1930s (pp. 196–197). Technicolor's monopoly, however, led independent producers to complain that the studios got preferential access. A court agreed, and in 1950 Technicolor was obliged to offer its services more widely. In this same year Eastman introduced a *monopack* (single-strip) color film. Eastman Color could be exposed in any camera and was easy to develop. The simplicity of Eastman's emulsion boosted the number of films shot in color. Technicolor ceased to be a camera stock in 1955, but the firm prepared release prints in its imbibition process until 1975.

Eastman Color lacked Technicolor's rich saturation, transparent shadows, and detailed textures. (Color Plates 10.2–10.8, 11.1, 15.5, and 17.2 are examples of Technicolor.) Still, the monopack stock was easier to use with the widescreen dimensions of the day. Unfortunately, Eastman Color images tended to fade—especially if the footage was hastily processed. By the early 1970s, many prints and negatives had turned a puttyish pink or a sickly crimson (**Color Plate 15.1**).

Nonetheless, at the time, color films provided an appeal that television could not match. So did bigger images. Between 1952 and 1955, many widescreen processes were introduced—or rather revived, since all had been tinkered with in the early sound era.

Cinerama, a three-projector system that created a multipaneled image, premiered in 1952. *This Is Cinerama* was a travelogue in which the audience was treated to a roller-coaster ride, a plane flight through the Grand Canyon, and other thrills. The film played at a single New York theater for over two years at unusually high admission prices, grossing nearly \$5 million.

Less elaborate was CinemaScope, introduced by 20th Century-Fox and first displayed in *The Robe* (1953). 'Scope became one of the most popular widescreen systems because it utilized conventional 35mm film and

SEE IT ON THE BIG SCREEN

Before 1954, American films were almost always shot and shown in a trim rectangle at the proportions of 1.37:1. (The arrival of sound had led studios to modify the common silent ratio of 1.33:1.) The early 1950s' technical innovations drastically widened the image, creating new aesthetic problems and opportunities for filmmakers.

Several incompatible formats competed. Some utilized wider film gauges. Todd-AO, for example, replaced the usual 35mm width with 65mm; the finished film would measure 70mm in width, allowing 5 mm for stereophonic sound tracks. Todd-AO was framed at a 2:1 aspect ratio. Such Todd-AO features as *Oklahoma!* (1955) were released on 70mm prints (15.1). Paramount's VistaVision process still used 35mm film but ran it horizontally through the camera.

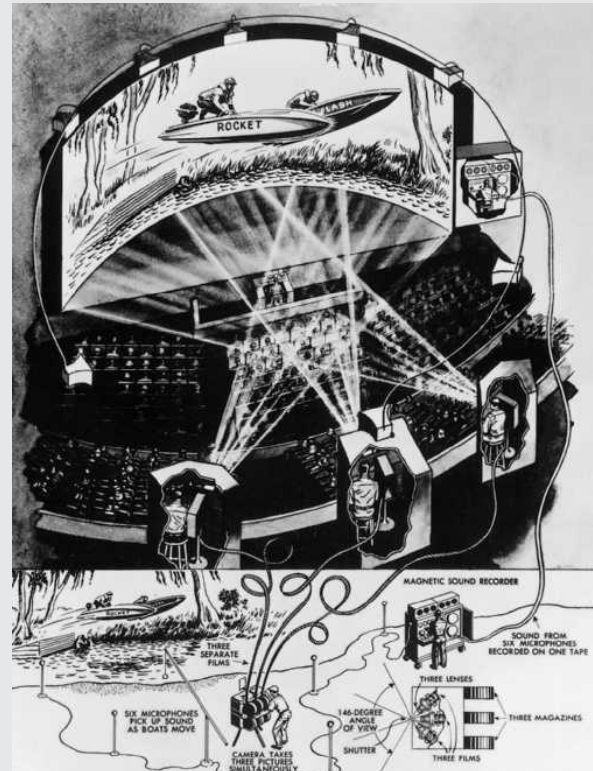


15.1 Two "fish-eye" Todd-AO lenses, one center left and one on the boom above, were used to shoot *Oklahoma!*; a CinemaScope version was shot simultaneously. (The 'Scope camera is center right.)



Because the frames were oriented horizontally rather than vertically across the film strip, they could be wider than 35mm, and hence a greater negative area was exposed. When compressed and printed in the normal 35mm format for release, this rendered a rich, dense image.

Cinerama achieved a wider picture by combining separate images. Three adjacent camera lenses exposed three strips of film simultaneously. Theaters showed the film on three mechanically interlocked projectors, yielding a sprawling 2.59:1 image on a curved 146-degree screen (15.2).



15.2 The Cinerama process (in publicity material). (Source: Cinerama)

15.3 The curved Cinerama screen and its three panels made horizontal action bulge in perverse ways (*How the West Was Won*, 1963).

(continued)

SEE IT ON THE BIG SCREEN, continued



15.4 A publicity photograph displays not only Marilyn Monroe but also the “squeezing” and “unsqueezing” of the CinemaScope process (*How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, 1953).



15.5 Directors soon learned to emphasize character reactions by framing the figures within well-bounded areas of the set. In *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955), the “boxing” of the three men neatly fills out the CinemaScope format.

Projectionists faced the constant risk of a reel’s breaking and falling out of synchronization with the others. In addition, odd images resulted from the *blend lines* separating the three panels (**15.3**).

The most popular widescreen system was CinemaScope, introduced by 20th Century-Fox in *The Robe* (1953). The CinemaScope camera was equipped with an anamorphic lens that took in a wide angle of view but squeezed it onto a strip of 35mm film. The film could be shown by attaching a comparable lens to the projector, which would unsqueeze the picture to create normal-looking images (**15.4**). CinemaScope was initially standardized at 2.55:1 (for magnetic sound) or 2.35:1 (for optical sound). Compared with most other widescreen systems, CinemaScope was inexpensive, technically simple, and fairly easy to use in shooting.

Some widescreen systems mixed these techniques. One process, displayed in the highly praised *Ben-Hur* (1959), combined anamorphic lenses with 65mm film to create images in a 2.76:1 ratio. The process eventually came to be known as Ultra Panavision 70. The Panavision company’s improvements in anamorphic optics, its lightweight 70mm cameras, and its sophisticated laboratory techniques

for reducing and blowing up different formats established it as the industry’s leader in widescreen technology.

At first, Hollywood’s creative personnel feared that the wide screen would immobilize the camera and lead to long takes. Some editors were afraid to cut quickly, worrying that viewers would not know where to look in a rapid series of wide compositions. A few early widescreen films, such as *The Robe*, *Oklahoma!*, and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, were rather theatrical, employing long-shot framings, frontal staging, and simple cutting.

Almost immediately, however, directors applied classical stylistic principles to widescreen composition. They exploited lighting and focus to emphasize the main figures, and they used depth to guide the spectator’s eye gracefully across the frame (**15.5**). Orthodox editing returned, complete with shot/reverse shots and analytical cuts (**15.6**, **15.7**). Alternatively, directors who had already exploited long takes and depth compositions packed the wide frame with significant detail.

By the mid-1960s, three sorts of widescreen systems dominated US production. Anamorphic 35mm was established at a ratio of 2.35:1, while nonanamorphic 35mm was

typically shown at 1.85:1. Most 70mm films were nonanamorphic and shown at a ratio of 2.2:1. Wider 70mm movies were usually blow-ups from anamorphic 35mm. These

widescreen systems would remain the principal options available for Hollywood filmmaking during the decades that followed.



15.6, 15.7 Shot/reverse shot in CinemaScope (*Bonjour Tristesse*, 1958). Typically framings like these decentered the actors, so that the cutting could create a balanced pattern.



fairly simple optics. Most studios adopted 'Scope; only Paramount clung to its own system, VistaVision, introduced in *White Christmas* (1954). Later, there came processes involving 70mm film (see box).

After 1954, most Hollywood films were designed to be shown in some format wider than 1.37:1. Hollywood continued to shoot many films in the Academy sound ratio, but the projectionist had to mask the projector aperture to create a wide image in the theater. To compete with America, major foreign industries developed their own anamorphic widescreen systems including Sovscope (the USSR), Dyaliscope (France), Shawscope (Hong Kong), and TohoScope (Japan).

Wider images required bigger screens, brighter projection, and modifications in theater design. Producers also demanded magnetically reproduced stereophonic sound. During the early 1950s, Hollywood studios gradually

converted from the optical sound recording introduced in the late 1920s to magnetic sound recording, using 1/4-inch audiotape or magnetically coated 35mm film. These innovations permitted engineers to enhance widescreen presentations with multiple-channel sound. Cinerama used six channels while CinemaScope used four. But the extra expense and a conviction that audiences paid more attention to the image than to the sound kept most exhibitors from installing magnetic projector heads and multi-channel sound systems. Although films' music, dialogue, and sound effects were recorded magnetically during production, most release prints encoded the sound information on optical tracks.

Other innovations of the period were passing fads. Stereoscopic, or "3-D," films had been toyed with since the beginning of cinema, but the process resurfaced during the postwar recession years. *Bwana Devil* (1952) employed

Natural Vision that required two strips of film to be shown one atop the other. The viewer wore polarized glasses that merged the two images into a sensation of depth. *Bwana Devil's* success led all the major studios to undertake 3-D projects, notably *House of Wax*, *Kiss Me Kate* (both 1953), and *Dial M for Murder* (1954). By 1954, however, the craze was over. Even more short-lived was the effort to add odors to films. In 1958, AromaRama and Smell-O-Vision met with largely negative responses. After the standardization of digital production in the 2000s, 3-D was revived and became a major option for filmmaking.

Hollywood Adjusts to Television

Television threatened certain staple products of theaters' programs. Newsreels, for instance, were largely abandoned after television news proved more efficient and immediate. Animated films were edged out more slowly; for two decades after the war, film programs still included short cartoons, and the major animators created works of comic imagination and technical finesse. At MGM, Tex Avery's manic frenzy worked at full heat in *King-Size Canary* (1947; **Color Plate 15.2**) and *The Magical Maestro* (1952), while William Hanna and Joseph Barbera made the "Tom and Jerry" series perhaps the most bloodthirsty films coming out of Hollywood.

The Warner Bros. cartoon unit became, if anything, even more bizarrely inventive than it had been during the war. Bob Clampett's *The Great Piggy Bank Robbery* (1946) takes Daffy Duck at a breakneck pace through a surrealist parody of film noir. Chuck Jones, who had begun as a head animator at Warners in the late 1930s, reached the top of his form, combining Wagnerian opera and Bugs Bunny illogic in *What's Opera, Doc?* (1957). He introduced the Road Runner series with *Fast and Furry-ous* (1949; **Color Plate 15.3**) and continued to direct its unpredictable variations on violence until his departure from the studio in 1961. During the 1950s, Jones also created several distinctive cartoons without the studio's stars. In *One Froggy Evening* (1955), a construction worker discovers a miraculous singing frog—which he attempts to exploit for money, until realizing that it sings only when alone with him (**Color Plate 15.4**).

Newer and smaller than the units at MGM and Warners was United Productions of America (UPA), formed in 1948 and releasing through Columbia. UPA cartoons placed their recurring characters, Mr. Magoo and Gerald McBoing Boing, in distinctive modernistic settings. One of the founders of UPA, John Hubley, left to form his own company in 1952. Hubley and his wife, Faith, made such films as *Moonbird* (1960; **15.8**) in a decorative style that



15.8 Sketchy, distorted figures against a semiabstract background in *Moonbird*.

elaborated on the more spare UPA approach. UPA succumbed to the small screen in 1959, when it was sold and began making cartoons for television.

Walt Disney continued distributing his cartoons through RKO until 1953, when he formed his own distribution firm, Buena Vista. Although Disney continued to make short films, his most profitable works were his feature-length cartoons, introduced every few years and periodically rereleased. These were often sanitized adaptations of children's classics, although *Alice in Wonderland* (1951; **Color Plate 15.5**) displayed a slapstick verve missing from solemn undertakings such as *Cinderella* (1950) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). The studio revisited its tradition of combining live action and animation in the enormously successful *Mary Poppins* (1964).

By the mid-1960s, however, broadcast animation had captured the audience. The major studios virtually stopped producing animated shorts; MGM's last Tom and Jerry films (directed by Jones) were released in 1967, and Warner Bros. shut down its animation unit in 1969. Now Bugs, Daffy, Popeye, and their peers could be found only in reruns on Saturday morning television, not in the local theater.

Yet Hollywood moved rapidly to take advantage of its new competitor. For one thing, the networks needed enormous quantities of programs to fill their broadcast hours. In the early 1950s, about one-third of broadcast material consisted of old films, mostly B pictures from Monogram, Republic, and other Poverty Row studios. In 1955, the bigger studios started selling the TV rights to their own libraries. In 1961, NBC launched the first weekly prime-time film series, "Saturday Night at the Movies," and, by 1968, there was a comparable film showcase on every weeknight. Rising fees for this programming made television sales a significant, predictable part of a film's income.

Moreover, the Hollywood studios started creating television shows. In 1949, Columbia converted its short-subject division, Screen Gems, to TV production. Among its products was the hit series "Father Knows Best" (1954–1962). When the networks moved from live broadcasting to filmed series in 1953, the demand for material intensified. Independent producers filled the need, as with "I Love Lucy," created by the Desilu company (which took over the RKO studio when that firm ceased production in 1957). As film production declined at the big studios, they generated income by renting out their production facilities for independent filmmaking, for both theatrical release and television broadcast.

Walt Disney made perhaps the shrewdest use of the new medium. Disney adamantly refused to sell his cartoons to television, since their carefully paced theatrical rereleases would yield profits for the indefinite future. In 1954, Disney contracted with ABC to produce an hour-long weekly show, "Disneyland." The hit series ran for decades under several names. The show permitted Disney to publicize his theatrical films and new theme park (opened in 1955). Disney filled his program with shorts and excerpts from the studio library. And when one of his TV series struck a chord, as did the saga of Davy Crockett, a reedited version of the programs could be released as a profitable theatrical feature.

After the first few years, the Hollywood firms did not suffer from the competition with television. They simply expanded their activities to encompass both entertainment media. The film-based component of the industry, however, did decline. In the 1930s, the Majors released close to 500 features annually, but by the early 1960s the average was under 150. Box-office receipts continued to fall until 1963, when television had effectively saturated the American market. After that, attendance rose a bit and leveled off at around a billion admissions per year. Still, it has never come close to the levels of the pre-TV era.

Art Cinemas and Drive-Ins

Before the 1950s, most studio productions were intended for a family audience. Responding to the decline in theater attendance, many producers now frequently targeted films specifically at adults, children, or teenagers.

Aiming at children and adolescents, Disney moved into live-action features with adventure classics (*Treasure Island*, 1950), adaptations of juvenile literature (*Old Yeller*, 1957), and fantasy comedies (*The Absent-Minded Professor*, 1961). These low-cost films were routinely among each year's top grossers.

In the mid-1950s, the *teenpics* market opened in earnest, as viewers born during World War II began making their consumer strength felt at the box office. Rock-and-roll musicals, juvenile-delinquency films, and science-fiction and horror items attracted the teenage market. The major studios reacted with *clean-teen* comedies and romances featuring Pat Boone and a succession of Tammys and Gidgets. America's burgeoning youth culture, centered on dating, pop music, souped-up cars, and fast food, was soon exported around the world, shaping cinema in other countries.

The demographic-target tactic also created new kinds of exhibition. Although a few small theaters had offered foreign films since the 1920s, the art-house audience became more significant after World War II. With thousands of veterans going to college through the GI Bill, an older, educated audience emerged, many of whose members had traveled in Europe during the war and for whom art films held some appeal.

The film industry had economic reasons for importing more films. American films were flooding into countries whose production was debilitated, but many governments restricted the amount of funds that could be taken out. American companies had to invest their profits within those countries or buy goods there for export. Buying the American distribution rights to foreign films proved one way of transferring profits legally.

Moreover, with US production in decline, importing art films provided smaller theaters with low-cost product. Some independent exhibitors, faced with sagging attendance, found that booking foreign films could attract the local elite. Such films were not broadcast on television, so these exhibitors suffered no competition.

As of 1950, there were fewer than 100 art theaters in the entire country, but, by the mid-1960s, there were more than 600, most in cities or college towns. They were usually small, independent houses decorated in a modern style calculated to appeal to an educated clientele. The lobbies often displayed paintings, and the refreshment counters were more likely to offer coffee and cake than soda and popcorn.

Some offbeat US independent fare received distribution in art theaters, but the staple programming came from Europe. The flow of imports began directly after the war ended, with Roberto Rossellini's *Open City*, released in 1946, earning high grosses and helping to create an interest in films made abroad. Carl Dreyer's *Day of Wrath*, Marcel Carné's *Children of Paradise*, and Vittorio De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* were among many that accustomed American audiences to reading subtitles. English films consistently dominated the import market.

Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* broke out of the art-cinema circuit to become one of the top-grossing films of 1948. During the 1950s, some imports from countries with looser censorship turned sex into an attraction at art houses. French director Roger Vadim's *And God Created Woman* (1957) made Brigitte Bardot a star in America. Quite often the "sophistication" of imported films owed more to daring subject matter than to complex form or profound themes.

Drive-in theaters presented another attractive alternative for exhibitors during a period of falling box-office receipts. The owner did not need an expensive building—only a screen, a speaker for each parking space, a concession stand, and a ticket booth. Farmland was relatively cheap, and the drive-in's typical location, just outside of town, made it handy for the new suburban population. Now people who seldom frequented the downtown theaters could easily go to the movies. Admission was also affordable, as films playing in drive-ins were often far past their first runs.

The first drive-in dated from 1933, but there were still only two dozen in the whole country in 1945. By 1956, more than 4,000 "ozoners" were operating—about equal to the number of "hardtop" theaters that closed in the postwar era. During the early 1950s, about one-quarter of box-office income came from drive-ins.

Drive-ins were not ideal venues for viewing. The tinny speakers yielded atrocious sound, rain could blur the picture, and cold weather required exhibitors to close down for the season or provide (feeble) heaters. But drive-ins proved successful with their target audiences. Despite the cheap tickets, most showed two or even three features. Parents could bring their children and avoid the cost of a babysitter. Since people could circulate during the film without clambering over their neighbors, concession stands did better business in drive-ins than in other theaters. Some drive-ins specialized in teenpics, and the prospect of sharing a dark front seat for several hours brought many adolescent couples to the local "passion pit."

Challenges to Censorship

Exploitation movies, imported films, and independent producers' "adult" themes and subjects inevitably posed problems. Films were failing to win approval from local censorship boards. A turning point in regulation came when an Italian film, Roberto Rossellini's *The Miracle* (1948), was denied an exhibition permit by the New York Board of Censors on the grounds that it was blasphemous. It told the story of a peasant woman who is convinced that her unborn child is the son of God. In 1952, the Supreme Court declared that films were covered by the First

Amendment's guarantee of free speech. Later court decisions made it clear that films could be censored only on grounds of obscenity, and even that was narrowly and vaguely defined. Many local censorship boards were dissolved, and few films were banned.

The industry's own self-censorship mechanism, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA, formerly the MPPDA), also faced problems enforcing its Production Code (pp. 192–193). The MPAA's main weapon for obliging distributors to submit their films for its approval was its rule that no theater belonging to the association would show a movie without a certificate of approval. Once the five Majors divested themselves of their theater chains, however, exhibitors were free to show unapproved films—often independent ones that had riskier subject matter than the MPAA allowed.

Partly in response to this increased competition, the big producer-distributors also began transgressing the Code's boundaries. One way of competing with television, which had extremely strict censorship, was to make films with more daring subject matter. As a result, producers and distributors pushed the Code further and further. When the MPAA refused to approve the mildly risqué *The Moon Is Blue* (1953, Otto Preminger), UA released it nevertheless. Preminger was persistent in flaunting the Code, and UA also distributed his film about drug addiction, *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), without an MPAA certificate.

Gradually the MPAA softened its position and began awarding seals to films that seemingly violated the original 1934 Code. Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* (1959) put Marilyn Monroe in a nearly transparent dress (decency being maintained only by a few strategically placed bits of embroidery and a shadow) and dealt lightheartedly with transvestism and implied bisexuality (see 15.32). It got a seal from the MPAA, even though the Catholic Legion of Decency nearly gave it a "condemned" rating. *Lolita* (Stanley Kubrick), which centered on a man's affair with an underage girl, could never have been released in the 1930s or 1940s, but it received a seal in 1962. The Code was obviously outdated, and the stage was set for a switch to a system of rating films, instituted by the MPAA in the mid-1960s (see Chapter 22).

THE NEW POWER OF THE INDIVIDUAL FILM AND THE REVIVAL OF THE ROADSHOW

A studio planned its production schedule by the year, always including several special films that would lure exhibitors to book their whole season's films from that firm.

After the Paramount decision, each individual film became more important. No movie could win its way simply by being slipped into a bundle of better films. Even a studio's cheapest, least prestigious film had to have its own attractions.

In the postwar years, Americans were more prosperous and had more types of entertainment to choose from. In 1943, 26 cents of every entertainment dollar was spent on going to movies. By 1955, that figure was down to 11 cents, and it continued to fall until leveling off at about 8 cents in the 1970s. People resisted buying tickets unless a movie was something special, an event. Successful big-budget movies played theaters for longer runs, so fewer movies were needed overall.

As a result, there came to be less distinction between A films and B films. With the Depression over and the high attendance in the immediate postwar years, theaters no longer had to offer a double feature. B films, which had usually filled the second half of programs in the 1930s, became insignificant to the big producers. Double features continued to a lesser degree into the 1960s, but the theaters showing them usually relied on two second-run A pictures or coupled an A picture with a cheaper one, often picked up from British or independent US producers. In general, the role of making cheaper films was taken over by independent producers who aimed their films at specific segments of the audience.

By making fewer films, the big companies were able to spend more money on each one. Much of this money went into attractions like color and widescreen images, designed to bring audiences back into the theater.

To set the biggest productions apart, in the 1950s distributors revived a tactic used occasionally for special films since the silent era: *roadshowing*. *The Birth of a Nation* had been a roadshow release in 1915. A roadshow film played in only one theater per market, with just two or three screenings each day. Higher-priced tickets for reserved seats, available in advance, compensated for the reduction in showings.

Roadshow attractions tended to highlight widescreen technology (pp. 294–297). Starting in 1952, Cinerama films, with their triple images, could play only in the small number of theaters built or remodeled for that purpose. Todd-AO films, with a 70mm width, were screened in about sixty specially equipped theaters, all on a roadshow basis. Only after a considerable delay were 35mm prints made available to other exhibitors. 20th Century-Fox also used roadshow distribution for some of its CinemaScope films.

Most roadshow releases were highly successful. Michael Todd, originally a New York theater producer,

formed Todd-AO with Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein as business partners. They agreed to have their hit Broadway musical *Oklahoma!* shot in the new process; the film ran for over a year in some venues. Roadshow pictures continued to be based on big Broadway shows and best-sellers. *Around the World in 80 Days* (1956) had an all-star cast and won several Oscars. During their limited initial releases, such films built up reputations as must-see events, and in later runs they played in many theaters. Roadshows remained a regular release method through the 1960s (see Chapter 22).

THE RISE OF THE INDEPENDENTS

The increasing importance of individual films went hand in hand with the growth of independent production, a trend that accelerated in the 1950s. An independent firm, by definition, is not vertically integrated; it is not owned by a distribution company and does not itself own a distribution company. An independent could be large and prestigious, like David O. Selznick, or small and marginal, such as the producers of exploitation films, which we shall discuss shortly.

Mainstream Independents: Agents, Star Power, and the Package

Many independent producers were entrepreneurs, and some stars and directors had an incentive to turn independent. In the 1930s and early 1940s, studios often signed stars to seven-year contracts, and the producers could put them into as many films as they wanted—whether the stars approved of the projects or not. Similarly, directors were often at odds with their studios over creative matters and longed for freedom.

A radical change that would transform the way films were made began with the help of a small music agency started back in 1924, the Music Corporation of America (MCA). In 1936, MCA hired a dynamic publicist named Lew Wasserman. A movie lover, Wasserman determined to expand into representing film stars. His first client was the temperamental Bette Davis, who was dissatisfied with her situation at Warner Bros. Despite having won two Oscars during the 1930s, she felt the studio often cast her in poor roles. In 1942, Wasserman turned Davis into her own company, B. D. Inc. Thereafter she got her usual acting fee plus 35 percent of the profits from each Warner Bros. film she was in.

In earlier years there had been a few stars powerful enough to demand percentages of their films' grosses or

profits, including Mary Pickford in the 1910s and Mae West and the Marx Brothers in the 1930s. Wasserman, however, made this practice relatively common. He negotiated a similar deal between Errol Flynn and Warner Bros. in 1947. In fact, the big studios wanted to reduce overhead costs by cutting back on the number of actors they had under long-term contract; yet, they had not planned on doing so by giving actors huge fees on each picture. Other agents adopted this approach, as when the William Morris firm arranged for Rita Hayworth to receive 25 percent of her pictures' profits as well as script approval.

Wasserman achieved his most spectacular deal for James Stewart. As a result of a disagreement with MGM, Stewart had found little work in Hollywood after the war. He returned to Broadway theater and at the end of the 1940s scored a success in the comic fantasy *Harvey*. In 1950, Wasserman sold Universal on the idea of a screen adaptation of the play, with Stewart getting a fee plus a percentage. Under the terms of the contract, Universal also had to produce an Anthony Mann Western, *Winchester 73* (1950), with Stewart getting no fee but half the profits. *Winchester 73* was a surprise hit and made Stewart a much richer man.

In negotiating this deal, Wasserman also was selling the adaptation rights to the play of *Harvey*. By combining star and project in one deal, he was "packaging" them. The *package-unit approach* to production, with a producer or agent assembling the script and the talent, came to dominate Hollywood production by the mid-1950s. For example, in 1958, *The Big Country* was made using a bevy of Wasserman's clients: director William Wyler and stars Gregory Peck, Charlton Heston, Carroll Baker, and Charles Bickford.

Wasserman worked similar magic for Alfred Hitchcock, who signed MCA as his agency in the early 1950s. Wasserman moved him from Warner Bros. to Paramount at a large pay raise. Since MCA also produced television programs, Wasserman persuaded Hitchcock to host and occasionally direct episodes for "Alfred Hitchcock Presents." He became the most recognizable filmmaker in the world. Wasserman also negotiated 10 percent of the gross of *North by Northwest* (1959) for Hitchcock. Since studio executives were reluctant to make the lurid black-and-white thriller *Psycho* (1960), Wasserman arranged for Hitchcock to help Paramount finance the film in exchange for 60 percent of the profits. The film's phenomenal success made Hitchcock the richest director in Hollywood.

As a result of many such deals, some agents came to have more power than the moguls who founded and headed the big studios. Indeed, MCA brought Universal

from its shaky state in the early 1950s to prosperity by decade's end. From 1959 to 1962, Wasserman masterminded MCA's acquisition of Universal, giving up the talent-agency wing of the business to run the studio.

The 1940s saw other directors and stars strike out on their own. After twelve years under contract to Warner Bros., Humphrey Bogart formed the Santana company to produce his own films. It lasted six years and made five films. Few small production firms, however, could weather a single box-office flop. Santana's last film, an eccentric spoof of film noir called *Beat the Devil* (1954), failed at the box office, and its subsequent cult status could not save Bogart's company.

John Ford's conflict with Darryl F. Zanuck over his Western masterpiece, *My Darling Clementine* (1946), led him to revive Argosy Pictures, the small production firm he had formed in the late 1930s to make *Stagecoach* (1939) and *The Long Voyage Home* (1940). In its new incarnation, Argosy produced nine of Ford's next eleven films, from the atmospheric drama *The Fugitive* (1947) to *The Sun Shines Bright* (1953).

Argosy's fortunes reflect the difficulties of independent production. The independents had to distribute their films through the large existing firms that emerged unscathed from the Paramount decision. Argosy's films were distributed through RKO, then MGM, then RKO again. Ford as producer went deep in debt to make each film. As the money came in, the banks took their share first, the distributor second, and Argosy third. Ford's company was in serious trouble when in 1952 he made his nostalgic Technicolor story of Ireland, *The Quiet Man*. Only the small B-film producer Republic would distribute the film, which became a commercial hit. Ford's next film, the old-fashioned comedy *The Sun Shines Bright*, killed Argosy Pictures.

Other directors managed independent production with greater long-term success. Having worked extensively for 20th Century-Fox, Otto Preminger began independent production with *The Moon Is Blue* (1953). Through Columbia and UA, he released such adaptations of best-sellers as *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959), *Exodus* (1960), and *Advise and Consent* (1962). Stars also managed occasionally to muster sufficient budgets for epic productions. Kirk Douglas produced the Roman Empire-era epic *Spartacus* in 1960, using Technicolor and Super Technirama 70. Its cast included Douglas, Laurence Olivier, Jean Simmons, and Tony Curtis (whose career blossomed during the 1950s under Wasserman's management).

Former moguls could also become independent producers. Hal Wallis, production chief at Warner Bros., left to produce on his own. He struck a long-term deal with

Paramount for the films of the most popular stars of the 1950s, comic Jerry Lewis and singer Dean Martin.

Independent production proved to have its own frustrations. Ultimately, independents had to deal with the main distribution firms, which often insisted on some creative input into individual films—a situation that sometimes differed little from conditions under the big production studios of the 1930s. In later decades, as powerful agents packaged stars and big-name directors into major projects, greater freedom was occasionally achieved (see Chapter 27).

Exploitation

When the major producers cut back their output of cheaper films, the small independent producers stepped in to fill the gap. Throughout the 1950s, most theaters still showed double features, and they needed inexpensive, attention-getting fare. The demand was met by independent companies that produced cheap pictures. Having no major stars or creative personnel, these films cashed in on topical or sensational subjects that could be “exploited.” *Exploitation films* had existed since World War I, but in the 1950s they gained new prominence. Exhibitors, now free to rent from any source, found that low-priced products could often yield a nicer profit than could big studio releases, which obliged them return back high percentages of box-office revenues.

Exploitation companies cranked out cheap horror, science-fiction, and erotic films. Among the most bizarre were those written and directed by Edward D. Wood. *Glen or Glenda* (aka *I Changed My Sex*, 1953) was a “documentary” about transvestism narrated by Bela Lugosi and starring Wood as a young man confused about his wardrobe preferences. *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959), a science-fiction invasion story, was filmed in an apartment, with the kitchen serving as an airplane cockpit. Lugosi died during the filming and was doubled by a chiropractor who scarcely resembled him. Ignored or mocked on their release, Wood’s films became cult classics in later decades.

American International Pictures (AIP) made more upscale exploitation items. AIP films aimed at what company head Sam Arkoff called “the gum-chewing, hamburger-munching adolescent dying to get out of the house on a Friday or Saturday night.”¹ Shot in a week or two with a young cast and crew, AIP films exploited high schoolers’ taste for horror (*I Was a Teenage Frankenstein*, 1957), crime (*Hot Rod Girl*, 1956), science fiction (*It Conquered the World*, 1956), and music (*Shake, Rattle & Rock!*, 1956). As AIP grew, it invested in bigger productions, such as beach musicals (*Muscle Beach Party*, 1964) and an



15.9 A publicity still from Corman’s *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1956).

Edgar Allan Poe horror cycle beginning with *House of Usher* (1960).

Roger Corman produced his first exploitation film (*The Monster from the Ocean Floor*, 1954) at a cost of \$12,000. Soon Corman was directing five to eight films a year, mostly for AIP. They had a rapid pace, tongue-in-cheek humor, and dime-store special effects, including monsters apparently assembled out of plumbers’ scrap and refrigerator leftovers (15.9). According to Corman, he shot three black comedies—*A Bucket of Blood*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and *Creature from the Haunted Sea* (all 1960)—over a two-week period for less than \$100,000, at a time when one ordinary studio picture cost \$1 million. Corman’s Poe cycle won him some critical praise for its imaginative lighting and color, but the films still appealed to teenagers through the scenery-chewing performances of Vincent Price.

Obliged to work on shoestring budgets, AIP and other exploitation companies pioneered efficient marketing techniques. AIP would often conceive a film’s title, poster design, and advertising campaign; test it on audiences and exhibitors; and only then begin writing a script. Whereas the major distributors adhered to the system of releasing films selectively for their first run, independent companies often practiced *saturation booking* (opening a film simultaneously in many theaters). The independents advertised on television, released films in the summer (previously thought to be a slow season), and turned drive-ins into first-run venues. All these innovations were eventually taken up by the Majors.

The exploitation market embraced many genres. William Castle followed the AIP formula for teen horror, but he added extra gimmicks, such as skeletons that shot out of the theater walls and danced above the audience (*The House on Haunted Hill*, 1958), as well as electrically wired seats that jolted the viewers (*The Tingler*, 1959).

Independents on the Fringe

Occasionally, independent production took a political stance. Herbert Biberman's *Salt of the Earth* (1954) followed the tradition of 1930s left-wing cinema in its depiction of a miners' strike in New Mexico. Several blacklisted film workers participated, including some of the Hollywood Ten. Most of the parts were played by miners and unionists. The hostile atmosphere of the anti-Red years hampered the production, and the projectionists' union blocked its theatrical exhibition.

The "New York School" of independent directors was less politically radical. Morris Engel shot *The Little Fugitive* (1953), an anecdote about a boy's wandering through Coney Island, with a handheld camera and postdubbed sound. Engel's later independent features, *Lovers and Lollipops* (1955) and *Weddings and Babies* (1958), used a lightweight 35mm camera and on-the-spot sound recording in a manner anticipating Direct Cinema documentary (pp. 435–441). Lionel Rogosin blended drama and documentary realism in *On the Bowery* (1956) and *Come Back, Africa* (1958).

CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD FILMMAKING: A CONTINUING TRADITION

Even as the industrial base of Hollywood filmmaking began to crack, the classical style remained a powerful model for storytelling. In addition, it underwent some important modifications during the postwar decades.

Complexity and Realism in Storytelling

In the early 1940s, Hollywood began exploring unusual narrative options. *Citizen Kane* (1941), with its complex flashback structure, was the most visible example, but *Double Indemnity* (1944) and other early film noirs proved influential too. At the same time, writers and directors experimented with subjective narrative techniques, as in *Kitty Foyle* (1940) and *Lydia* (1941).

Many of these devices had been used in the silent era, but Hollywood largely abandoned them when sound came in 1930s filmmakers favored linear, objective presentation, enhanced by music and rapid-fire dialogue. In the 1940s, however, Hollywood returned to time-shifting plots and probes of characters' minds, now enhanced by sophisticated use of sound. Voice-overs could accompany flashbacks and tap into characters' thoughts, while distorted music and sound effects emphasized their dreams and hallucinations.

Postwar filmmakers intensified these efforts. Flashbacks, treated as character memory or confession, took on



15.10 *The Lady in the Lake*: "our" mirror image and a subjective point of view.

a new complexity. In *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949), each protagonist is forced to recall crucial incidents in her marriage. The melodrama *The Locket* (1946), in which a husband tries to find out about his wife's past, contains a flashback-within-a-flashback-within-a-flashback. There were lying flashbacks, as in *Crossfire* (1947), and flashbacks that replayed key incidents with new information, as in *Mildred Pierce* (1945) and *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954).

More filmmakers tried to put audiences in the characters' place. The first several scenes of *Dark Passage* (1947) are presented through the eyes of the protagonist. In *Hangover Square* (1947), dissonant music suggests the demented imagination of a serial killer, while *Possessed* (1947) conveys a woman's growing madness through exaggerated noises. For most of *The Lady in the Lake* (1947), the image presents detective Philip Marlowe's optical viewpoint on the action. Characters appear to punch or kiss the camera, and during his investigation Marlowe becomes visible only when we glimpse him in a mirror (**15.10**). Such films rely on techniques of camerawork and mise-en-scène pioneered by French Impressionism and German Expressionism.

Most of these innovations did not threaten the premises of classical narrative filmmaking. Scrambled time schemes and haunted imaginations usually became straightened out and anchored in a coherent story world. And since most of these experiments involved mysteries, the plots relied on conventions from the detective genre. Yet a few films, such as *The Chase* (1946) and *The Guilt of Janet Ames* (1947), took flashbacks and subjectivity so far that they became difficult to follow.

While some directors were exploring complex storytelling tactics, others were embracing an unprecedented realism of setting, lighting, and narration. The trend toward

location shooting, initiated during the war when the government imposed a limit on budgets for set construction, continued. The semidocumentary film, usually a police investigation or crime tale, staged a fictional narrative in existing locales and was often filmed with lightweight equipment developed in wartime. For example, *13 Rue Madeleine* (1947) and *The Naked City* (1948) used portable photo-floods to light rooms for filming. *The Thief* (1952) was filmed in Washington, DC, and New York City, often concealing its camera; one shot, with the camera on a cart, tracked for five blocks. Such films, based on actual incidents, frequently featured a thunderous voice-over narration that evoked wartime documentaries and radio broadcasts.



15.11 *Sunset Blvd.*: As the man's voice-over recounts his own death, a striking underwater shot shows the police at the swimming pool investigating.

A complex flashback narrative and a semidocumentary feel might be found in the same film. *Sunset Blvd.* (1950), a memory narrated by a dead man, exploits actual Hollywood locations (15.11). One of the most intricate examples of artifice in the semidocumentary is Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing* (1956). Several men carry out a precisely timed robbery of a racetrack. Kubrick gives us newsreel-quality images of the track and the races, and many scenes use a dry "voice of God" commentator to specify the day and time of many scenes. Yet *The Killing* also manipulates time in a complex way. We see a bit of the robbery, and then the film skips back to show events leading up to that phase. As the film traces different lines of action, events are presented several times—an innovation Quentin Tarantino was to revive in *Pulp Fiction* (1994).

Stylistic Changes

Kane had reinvigorated the use of long takes and deep-space imagery (p. 199), and these techniques, taken up during the war, became even more prominent during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Scenes might now be filmed in a single shot (the so-called *plan-séquence*, or sequence shot; 15.12–15.17). Often the long take



15.12 In *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), a three-minute sequence shot with movement in depth replaces traditional cutting. Within a deep-focus composition, the truck driver quarrels with Gus, the owner of the diner.



15.13 Gus shoves him out the door . . . (*The Asphalt Jungle*).



15.14 . . . and continues to berate him . . . (*The Asphalt Jungle*).



15.15 . . . before coming to the foreground to advise Dix to lie low (*The Asphalt Jungle*).



15.16 Dix leaves . . . (*The Asphalt Jungle*).



15.17 . . . and Gus goes to the rear to make a phone call (*The Asphalt Jungle*).



15.18 Deep focus emphasizes a gun-obsessed boy in *Gun Crazy* (1949).



15.19 Cinematographer John Alton's low-key lighting typified film noir (*T-Men*, 1948).



15.20 *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955): a densely cluttered shot with violence at its center.



15.21 High-key lighting in *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952).

featured very fluid camera movement, facilitated by new *crab dollies*, which moved the camera freely in any direction. In addition, the vivid deep focus that had been a Welles-Toland trademark was widely imitated (15.18).

Many of these innovations were associated with film noir, the “dark” style that flourished until the end of the 1950s. Adventurous cinematographers pushed chiaroscuro lighting extremes (15.19). Film noirs became more outrageously baroque, with canted compositions and layers of visual clutter (15.20). These stylistic developments attracted enough notice to make them the target of satire. *Susan Slept Here* (1954) mocks the flashback narrative by having an Oscar statuette narrate the film. The “Girl Hunt” ballet in the musical *The Band Wagon* (1953) parodies the excesses of film noir.

In black-and-white dramas, *low-key lighting* schemes continued well into the 1960s, but films in other genres exploited a brighter, *high-key* look (15.21). Most melodramas, musicals, and comedies of the 1950s avoided chiaroscuro. Deep-focus cinematography continued well into the 1960s for black-and-white films, but color films usually cultivated shallow-focus imagery. And for some time, aggressive deep focus of the Wellesian sort proved difficult to achieve with CinemaScope’s anamorphic lenses.

New Twists on Old Genres

With greater competition for the entertainment dollar, the major firms gave nearly all genres a higher gloss. And as studios cut back on the number of films produced, each movie had to be more distinctive. Executives enhanced production values with bigger stars, opulent sets and costumes, and the resources of color and widescreen technology. Even minor genres benefited from efforts to turn B scripts into A pictures.

The Western The postwar Western was set on the “big-picture” trail by David O. Selznick with *Duel in the Sun* (1945). King Vidor was fired from this passion-drenched Technicolor saga before several other directors completed it. Roadshowed, it earned large grosses and set the pattern for *Red River* (1948), *Shane* (1953), *The Big Country* (1958), and other “super-Westerns.”

More modest Westerns also benefited from enhanced production values, the maturity and range of the directors and stars, and a new narrative and thematic complexity. The genre helped John Wayne and James Stewart consolidate their postwar reputations. Color cinematography enhanced the majestic scenery of *The Naked Spur* (1953, Mann) and the rich costume design of Hawks’s *Rio Bravo* (1959; **Color Plate 15.6**). At the same time, social and

psychological tensions were incorporated. A Western might be liberal (*Broken Arrow*, 1950), patriarchal (*Red River*; *The Gunfighter*, 1950), youth-oriented (*The Left-Handed Gun*, 1958), or psychopathic (the Ranown cycle directed by Budd Boetticher; Sam Peckinpah's *The Deadly Companions*, 1961).

While the typical B film had run between 60 and 70 minutes, *Duel in the Sun* clocked in at 130 minutes, *Red River* at 133, and *Shane* at 118. Even less epic Westerns tended to run longer; *Rio Bravo*'s charmingly rambling plot filled 141 minutes. Clearly such films were no longer designed to be the second half of a double feature—they were the sole attraction.

The Melodrama Enhanced production values also drove the melodrama to new heights. At Universal, producer Ross Hunter specialized in *women's pictures*, and central to his revamping of the genre was Douglas Sirk. Sirk was an émigré (p. 245) who had made anti-Nazi pictures and film noirs during the 1940s. Working with cinematographer Russell Metty, Sirk lit Universal's plush sets in a melancholy, sinister low key. Psychologically impotent men and gallantly suffering women (*Magnificent Obsession*, 1954; *All That Heaven Allows*, 1955; *Written on the Wind*, 1956; *Imitation of Life*, 1959) play out their dramas in expressionistic pools of color and before harshly revealing mirrors (**Color Plates 15.7, 15.8**). Critics in later decades believed that Sirk's style undercut the scripts' pop-psychology traumas and pat happy endings.

The Musical No genre benefited more from upgrading than the musical, believed to be Hollywood's most durable product. Every studio made musicals, but the postwar decade was ruled by MGM. The studio's three production units mounted everything from operatic biopics to Esther Williams aquatic extravaganzas. Backstage musicals like *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949) were balanced by folk musicals like *Show Boat* (1951). Adaptations of Broadway hits (e.g., *Kiss Me Kate*, 1953) were matched by original scripts (e.g., *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, 1954). A film might be built around a set of career hits from a single lyricist-composer team. *The Band Wagon* (1953), for example, was based on the songs of Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz.

The most lauded musical unit at MGM was overseen by Arthur Freed, a top producer since *The Wizard of Oz*. The Freed unit showcased the best talents—Judy Garland, Fred Astaire, Vera-Ellen, Ann Miller, and, above all, Gene Kelly, the wiry, wide-grinning dancer who added athletic modern choreography to the MGM product. *On the Town*

(1949, codirected by Kelly and Stanley Donen), a frenetic tale of three sailors on a day pass in Manhattan, was not the first film to stage its numbers on location, but the choreography and the cutting gave the film a hectic urban energy (**Color Plate 15.9**). In *Brigadoon* (1954, Vincente Minnelli) and *It's Always Fair Weather* (1955, Kelly and Donen), Kelly made the musical a sour comment on masculine frustrations in postwar America.

More lighthearted was *Singin' in the Rain* (1952, Kelly and Donen), considered the finest musical of the period. Set during the transition to talkies, the film pokes fun at Hollywood pretension while satirizing the style of early musicals and creating gags with out-of-sync sound. The numbers include Donald O'Connor's calisthenic "Make 'Em Laugh"; Kelly's title number, blending swooping crane shots with agile choreography that exploits puddles and umbrellas; and the "Broadway Melody" number, an homage to MGM's early sound musicals.

Although MGM continued to turn out striking musicals after the mid-1950s, it was no longer the leader. Goldwyn's *Guys and Dolls* (1955), Paramount's *Funny Face* (1956), UA's *West Side Story* (1961), Columbia's *Bye Bye Birdie* (1963), and Disney's animated ventures all made the "big musical" a box-office stalwart. 20th Century-Fox based several roadshow musicals on Broadway hits—*The King and I* (1956), *Carousel* (1956), and *South Pacific* (1958), followed a few years later by the biggest blockbuster of all, *The Sound of Music* (1965). Warners contributed to the genre with George Cukor's *A Star Is Born* (1954) and Doris Day vehicles such as *The Pajama Game* (1957) before dominating the 1960s with *The Music Man* (1962), *My Fair Lady* (1964), and *Camelot* (1967).

Rock and roll brought new dynamism to the post-war musical. *Rock around the Clock* (1956) paved the way, and soon both Majors and independents went after teenage record buyers. In *Love Me Tender* (1956), Elvis Presley went on to present a fairly sanitized version of rock and roll in thirty musicals over the next dozen years. The genre was mocked in Frank Tashlin's *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956), which nonetheless managed to include numbers by popular bands.

Historical Epics Westerns, melodramas, and musicals had been major genres for several decades, but the inflation of production values and the speculating on big pictures brought another genre to prominence. The biblical spectacle had proved lucrative in the hands of Cecil B. DeMille in the 1920s and 1930s, but it had lain untouched until DeMille revived it in *Samson and Delilah*, the top-grossing film of 1949. When *Quo Vadis?* and *David and Bathsheba*

(both 1951) also earned exceptional receipts, a cycle of historical pageants was launched. The genre's need for crowds, colossal battles, and grandiose sets made it natural for wide-screen processes, and so *The Robe*, its sequel *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954), and *Spartacus* (1960) all showcased widescreen technologies.

"Those who see this motion picture produced and directed by CECIL B. DEMILLE will make a pilgrimage over the very ground that Moses trod more than 3,000 years ago." Thus opens *The Ten Commandments* (1956), one of the most enduringly successful biblical epics. (Some observers noted that the credit gives Moses only second billing.) The film used 25,000 extras and cost over \$13 million, a stupendous amount for the time. Despite ambitious special effects like the parting of the Red Sea, DeMille's staging often harked back to the horizontal blocking of his 1930s films (15.22). William Wyler's *Ben-Hur* (1959) proved an equally successful biblical blockbuster; it held the record for the most Oscars won (eleven) for decades, until another historical epic, *Titanic* (1997), tied with it.



15.22 *The Ten Commandments*: the pharaoh and his counselors, staged in a classic linear shot.

Historical epics treated virtually every period. There were Egyptian pageants (*The Egyptian*, 1954; *Land of the Pharaohs*, 1955), chivalric adventures (*Ivanhoe*, 1952; *Knights of the Round Table*, 1953), and war sagas (*War and Peace*, 1956; *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, 1957; *Exodus*, 1960). Most of these attracted audiences, but because of budget overruns in production, some ultimately proved unprofitable.

Upscaling Genres Another genre was revived by the new commitment to big pictures. As the market in science-fiction writing expanded after the war, producer George Pal proved that the atomic age offered a market for science-fiction movies. The success of his *Destination Moon* (1950) gave him access to Paramount budgets for *When Worlds Collide* (1951) and two prestigious productions based on works by H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (1953) and *The Time Machine* (1960). Using color and sophisticated special effects, Pal's films helped lift science fiction to a new respectability. *Forbidden Planet* (1956), with CinemaScope, electronic music, an "Id-beast," and a plot based on *The Tempest*, was a somewhat more forced effort to dignify the genre. Disney's first CinemaScope feature, *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* (1954), and the precise stop-motion work of Ray Harryhausen (e.g., *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*, 1958) aided the rebirth of the fantasy film.

Less expensive science-fiction and horror films portrayed technology in a struggle with unknown nature. In *The Thing* (1951), scientists and military men discover a monstrous alien in the Arctic wastes. In *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), an average town is overrun by pods from outer space who clone the citizens and replace them with unfeeling replicas (15.23). Opposed to these paranoid fantasies were pacifist films, exemplified by *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, in which an alien urges earthlings to give



15.23 In *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, Don Siegel uses a depth composition to let us see the pod-person waking up in the foreground before the weary characters notice it.

up war. Special effects dominated films that portrayed eccentric science and misbegotten experiments, such as *The Fly* (1958) and *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957). Such films were often interpreted as commentaries on Cold War politics or the nightmarish effect of nuclear radiation.

Low-budget movies, in order to compete with the new scale of expenditures, had to find their own selling points. The crime film, for instance, became more violent. Menacing film noirs like *Out of the Past* (1947) seemed subdued in comparison to the sadism of *The Big Heat* (1953) and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) and the brutality of a thug running down a little girl in *Underworld USA* (1961).

By the early 1960s, a genre film might be either a lavish blockbuster or a stark, seedy exercise. When the distinguished Hitchcock made a black-and-white thriller called *Psycho* (1960) without major stars and on a B-picture budget, he launched a cycle of grand guignol (e.g., *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, 1962) that continued for decades. After fifteen years of dressing up genre formulas, leading filmmakers began to dirty them up.

MAJOR DIRECTORS: SEVERAL GENERATIONS

A few major directors ceased working or lost impetus fairly soon after the war. Ernst Lubitsch died in 1947. Josef von Sternberg, who had left Paramount in the mid-1930s and worked sporadically through the 1940s, ended his career with two films for Howard Hughes and *The Saga of Anatahan* (1953), a Japan-US coproduction exuding the misty atmosphere of his prewar work. Frank Capra made *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), a mixture of homespun comedy and astonishingly cruel melodrama, but his few later features had little influence.

The Great Dictator had been the last bow of Charles Chaplin's Tramp. His experiments with other personae, coupled with controversies about his politics and personal life, made his popularity sink. *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) centered on a quiet gentleman who murders his wives; *Lime-light* (1952) was a testament to comic theater. Threatened with political persecution in the United States, Chaplin settled in Switzerland. *A King in New York* (1957) satirized American politics, while *A Countess from Hong Kong* (1967) bade farewell to the urbane comedy of *A Woman of Paris*.

Veterans of the Studio Era

Overall, however, a number of veteran directors continued to be central players in the postwar period. Cecil B.

DeMille, Clarence Brown, Henry King, George Marshall, and others who had started directing during World War I remained surprisingly active into the 1950s and even the 1960s. Raoul Walsh, for example, turned out masculine action films, and *Colorado Territory* and *White Heat* (both 1949) remain models of the trim, understated efficiency of Hollywood classicism.

John Ford was still the most visible director of this generation. His Technicolor Irish comedy-drama *The Quiet Man* (1952) gave its backer, the B-studio Republic, new credibility. The sparkling location photography, the interplay of spirited romance and brawling comedy, and a buoyant epilogue in which the performers salute the audience have made *The Quiet Man* one of Ford's most enduring pictures, a utopian fulfillment of the nostalgic longing for home that permeates *How Green Was My Valley*.

The bulk of Ford's postwar work was in the Western genre. *My Darling Clementine* (1946) is an ode to frontier life, shot in the rich depth and chiaroscuro that Ford had pioneered a decade earlier. His Cavalry trilogy—*Fort Apache*, 1948; *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, 1949; *Rio Grande*, 1950—pays homage to the close-knit military unit. *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960) and *Two Rode Together* (1961) raise issues of rape and miscegenation in the manner of "liberal Westerns," and each experiments a bit: the former with flashback narrative, the latter with an unmoving long take. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), widely taken as Ford's elegy for the frontier myth, has the simplicity of a fable: the heroic side of the West dies in the corruption brought by the railroad and Washington politics.

The Searchers (1956), arguably Ford's most complex Western, centers on Ethan Edwards, who pursues the Comanche who have killed his brother's family and carried off his niece Debbie. His saddle partner Martin Pawley gradually realizes that Ethan intends not to rescue Debbie but to kill her for becoming an Indian wife. Sel-don had the Western shown such a complex protagonist, in which devotion and pride struggle against violent racism and sexual jealousy.

The continuity of Ford's style is evident in *The Searchers*. The film's color scheme reflects the changing seasons across Monument Valley (**Color Plate 15.10**). Fordian depth of space emerges in an evocative motif of doorway framings (**15.24–15.26**). Even John Wayne's final gesture of clasping his forearm is modeled on a gesture Harry Carey had used in *Straight Shooting* (1917).

Other veteran directors continued to practice their craft despite the studios' decline. William Wyler directed notable dramas and studio pictures into the 1960s, earning large box-office revenues with *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) and *Ben-Hur*. The deep-focus, wide-angle



15.24 In *The Searchers*, the motif is established in the first shot when the mother opens the door onto the desert.



15.25 Later, Ford reminds us of the destroyed home by shooting through the opening of the smoke (*The Searchers*) house in which the mother's body lies.



15.26 The end of a search: after bringing Debbie back to the settlement, Ethan cannot reenter civilization (*The Searchers*).



15.27, left Moderated deep focus in *The Best Years of Our Lives*.



15.28, right In *Adam's Rib* (1949), a long take records the wry interplay between an attorney (Katharine Hepburn) and her district attorney husband (Spencer Tracy).



15.29 *The Cobweb* (1955): in a sanitarium, characters confront each other before the controversial drapes.

look was already muted in *Best Years* (15.27); Wyler largely left the technique to directors working in genres more oriented to suspense or action. Howard Hawks made comedies and action-adventure films until 1970. King Vidor turned to spectacles (*War and Peace*) after directing overblown, delirious melodramas such as *The Fountainhead* (1949). George Stevens created several of the era's biggest hits, notably *Shane* (1953) and *Giant* (1956).

Of the directors specializing in melodramas, comedies, and musicals, Vincente Minnelli and George Cukor stand out for their shrewd use of long takes. Cukor's

A Star Is Born (1954) daringly activates the edges of the 'Scope frame. And his quietly watching camera permits the players full sway in their performances (15.28). Minnelli's melodramas use distant framings to juxtapose the characters with symbolic décor (15.29).

Émigrés Stay On

Some émigré directors, such as Jean Renoir and Max Ophüls, returned to Europe fairly soon after the end of the war, but others stayed on and flourished. The most successful was Alfred Hitchcock (see box). Fritz Lang



15.30 The rogue cop finds his way blocked in Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953).



15.31 *Some Like It Hot*: Jack Lemmon, as "Daphne," dances a passionate tango with Joe E. Brown.

continued to make sober, somber genre pictures that radiated paranoid unease, such as *Rancho Notorious* (1952) and *The Big Heat* (15.30). Billy Wilder became a top director noted for irony-laden dramas (*Sunset Blvd.*, 1950; *Ace in the Hole*, 1951; *Witness for the Prosecution*, 1958) and cynical erotic comedies (*The Seven-Year Itch*, 1955; *The Apartment*, 1960; *Irma La Douce*, 1963). *Some Like It Hot* (1959), less mordant than Wilder's usual work, delighted audiences with its cross-dressing gags (15.31).

Another émigré, Otto Preminger, cultivated a distinctive personality both as an actor (in Wilder's *Stalag 17*, 1953) and as a director. His despotic temper was sometimes compared to Erich von Stroheim's, but Preminger was no spendthrift; as his own producer, he counted every penny. Partly to trim shooting time, he pushed the

long-take technique even further than Cukor and Minnelli. The average shot in *Fallen Angel* (1945) lasts about half a minute, the same as in his 'Scope musical *Carmen Jones* (1954; see 15.5).

Although Preminger ingeniously composed his CinemaScope frame (15.34), most of his long takes refuse expressive effects. There are seldom elaborate camera maneuvers or virtuoso performances; the camera simply observes poker-faced people, most of whom are lying to one another. This impassivity makes Preminger's film noirs and adaptations of middlebrow best-sellers intriguingly opaque.

Welles's Struggle with Hollywood

A much more flamboyant strategy was pursued by Orson Welles. Discharged from RKO after *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), Welles became a vagabond director. He turned in pictures for Columbia, Republic, and Universal, but he produced other films on a shoestring, with funds scraped together from European backers and his film performances (e.g., in Carol Reed's rather Wellesian *The Third Man*, 1949).

Welles directed and starred in versions of *Macbeth* (1948), *Othello* (1952), and *The Trial* (1962), and he also made espionage films (*Mr. Arkadin*, 1955) and crime thrillers (*The Lady from Shanghai*, 1948; *Touch of Evil*, 1958). To all he brought the extroverted technique he had pioneered in *Kane*—Gothic chiaroscuro, deep-focus imagery, sound tracks of shattering dynamic range, brooding dissolves, abrupt cuts, overlapping and interruptive dialogue, and intricate camera movement. The climax of *The Lady from Shanghai*, a shoot-out in a fun-house hall of mirrors, is less a plausible resolution of the drama than a virtuoso display of disorienting imagery (15.35). *Touch of Evil*, beginning with one of the most baroque camera movements in Hollywood history, brought the film noir to new heights. In *Chimes at Midnight* (1967), an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, Welles presented the most kinetic, harrowing battle sequence of the era (15.36). Welles haunted the studios in the 1970s and 1980s, hoping to complete his long-running projects, *Don Quixote* and *The Other Side of the Wind*.

The Impact of the Theater

Welles had come to Hollywood from New York left-wing theater, and several other directors followed him. Jules Dassin started in this vein before turning out harsh crime films (e.g., *Brute Force*, 1947; *The Naked City*, 1948).

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

Apart from the filmmakers who were also performers (Chaplin, Jerry Lewis), Hitchcock was probably the most publicly recognizable director of the postwar years. The press delightedly reported his remarks: “Actors are cattle”; “A film is not a slice of life but a slice of cake”; “Ingrid, it’s only a movie” (after Bergman had sought to understand her role’s motivation). His walk-on appearances, quizzically observing the crises his plots set in motion, guaranteed a moment of laughter. His image as the “Master of Suspense” was marketed through shrewd spin-offs: chatty trailers, a mystery magazine, and a television show, with Hitchcock introducing each episode in phlegmatically ghoulish tones.

Above all, the films themselves carried the stamp of his fussy, childish delight in discomfiting the audience. Like his mentors the Soviet Montage directors, he aimed at a pure, almost physical response. His goal was not mystery or horror but suspense. His plots, whether drawn from novels or his own imagination, hinged on recurring figures and situations: the innocent man plunged into a vortex of guilt and suspicion, the mentally disturbed woman, the charming and amoral killer, the humdrum locale with tensions seething underneath. The consistency of his stories and themes furnished evidence for the European critics who proposed that an American studio director could be the creator—the “author”—of his work (p. 372).

Hitchcock flaunted his stylistic ingenuity, embedding into each script a set piece that aroused suspense in the teeth of outrageous implausibility: an assassination is

attempted during an orchestra concert (*The Man Who Knew Too Much*, 1956), and a crop-dusting airplane tries to shoot down the protagonist (*North by Northwest*, 1959). Sometimes Hitchcock set himself a technical challenge: *Rope* (1948) consists of eleven long takes. In *Rear Window* (1951), by contrast, hundreds of shots are assembled to induce the viewer to share the hero’s belief that a man living across the courtyard has committed murder (**Color Plates 15.11, 15.12**).

Many critics found Hitchcock’s postwar work to be his finest. *Strangers on a Train* (1951) employs taut crosscutting to divide our sympathies between hero and villain (**15.32, 15.33**). The semidocumentary *The Wrong Man* (1956) invests a drab news story with harsh anguish. *Vertigo* (1958) uses location shooting and Bernard Herrmann’s haunting score to pull the spectator into a hallucinatory tale of a man obsessed with a woman whom he believes he has killed (**Color Plate 15.13**). Hitchcock’s films gave Cary Grant, James Stewart, and Henry Fonda dark brooding roles suited to their maturing star images.

Hitchcock’s calculations of public taste were far-sighted. *Psycho* (1960) triggered several cycles of homicidal films, up to the “slasher” movies of the 1980s; *The Birds* (1963) anticipated the “vengeful nature” horror film. Like most veteran directors, he floundered in the mid-1960s, but *Frenzy* (1972) proved that he could still craft a plot that outfoxed the audience and that his technical virtuosity could leave viewers at once anxious and amused.



15.32 *Strangers on a Train*: while the hero desperately tries to finish a tennis match in time . . .



15.33 . . . the villain scrabbles for the lighter he needs in order to frame the hero for a murder. Hitchcock makes the audience root for both (*Strangers on a Train*).



15.34 *Advise and Consent* (1962): in the US Senate, Preminger's 'Scope frame registers different reactions to a blustering speech.



15.35 The final shoot-out in a mirror maze in *The Lady from Shanghai*.



15.36 *Chimes at Midnight*: a deep-space view of a chaotic battle, with the camera flanked by the warriors' furiously scuffling legs.



15.37 In a long take, Terry toys with Edie's glove, keeping her with him while he expresses his reluctant interest in her (*On the Waterfront*).

Joseph Losey worked in the Federal Theatre project and directed Brecht's play *Galileo* (1947) before entering filmmaking with *The Boy with Green Hair* (1948). The HUAC hearings drove Dassin and Losey into exile.

During the 1930s, the Group Theatre transplanted to America the naturalistic acting "Method" taught by Konstantin Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theater. The most influential Group alumnus was Elia Kazan, who established himself in Hollywood while continuing to direct the Broadway premieres of *Death of a Salesman*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. After specializing in liberal social-problem films, Kazan moved rapidly to distinguished adaptations of works by Tennessee Williams—*A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) and *Baby Doll* (1956)—as well as to socially critical films such as *A Face in the Crowd* (1957), which warns of the political abuses of television.

After the war, Kazan and two New York colleagues founded the Actors Studio. They believed that Stanislavsky's Method required the actor to ground the performance in personal experiences. Improvisation was one path to a natural, if sometimes painful and risky, portrayal. Kazan's conception of Method acting found its most

famous exponent in Marlon Brando. A prototypical Method exercise occurs in Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954), in which Terry picks up and toys with Edie's casually dropped glove. Keeping her glove becomes a pretext for making her linger with him, but—as he straightens the fingers, plucks lint from it, even tries it on—it also expresses his awkward attraction to her and provides an echo of the childhood teasing he recalls (15.37). Method acting was to have an enormous influence on Hollywood through Kazan, Brando, James Dean, Karl Malden, and other Actors Studio participants.

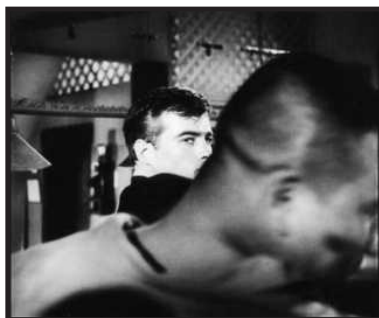
Nicholas Ray worked with the Group Theatre before serving as assistant director to Kazan on *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945). He began directing with a painful tale of a runaway couple drawn into the outlaw life, *They Live by Night* (1948). Always a fringe figure, Ray specialized in films about men whose toughness masks a self-destructive compulsion. *In a Lonely Place* (1950) implicates a Hollywood scriptwriter in a murder, revealing his narcissistic exploitation of others. In the offbeat Western *Johnny Guitar* (1954), the weary gunfighter is dominated by the hard-as-nails saloon lady; the film climaxes with a showdown between two gun-toting women. *Rebel without a*

Cause (1954) showcases James Dean as another tormented hero, childishly passive and uncertain; it also demonstrates Ray's forceful use of the CinemaScope frame. In the opening police-station scene, Judy, Plato, and Jim are brought together unbeknown to one another. The wide framing tucks them into discrete pockets of the set (**Color Plate 15.14**). After several other "male melodramas," Ray ended his Hollywood career with two historical epics, *King of Kings* (1961) and *55 Days at Peking* (1963).

New Directors

Another group of postwar directors emerged from scriptwriting: Richard Brooks (*The Blackboard Jungle*, 1955; *Elmer Gantry*, 1960), Joseph Mankiewicz (*All about Eve*, 1950; *The Barefoot Contessa*, 1954), and Robert Rossen (*Johnny O'Clock*, 1947; *The Hustler*, 1961). The most idiosyncratic talent was Samuel Fuller, who had been a scenarist for a decade before he directed his first film, *I Shot Jesse James* (1949). A former reporter for New York tabloids, Fuller brought a B-film sensibility to every project. He relied on intense close-ups, off-center framings, and shock editing to underscore his tales of underworld treachery or men facing death in combat.

Fuller went straight for the viscera. During a fistfight in *Pickup on South Street* (1953), a man is dragged down a flight of stairs, his chin bumping on each step. At the showdown of *Forty Guns* (1957), a cowboy punk uses his sister as a shield. The lawman coolly shoots her. As she falls, he proceeds to fire several rounds into the astonished youth. In *China Gate* (1957), a soldier hiding from an enemy patrol steps on a spike trap, and Fuller cuts from shots of his sweating face to extreme close-ups of spikes protruding from his boot. Fuller enjoyed staging fight scenes that assault the viewer (**15.38**). The opening of *The Naked Kiss* (1964) turns its fury on the audience, with a woman directly striking the camera.



15.38 Using karate on a villain, and the viewer, in *The Crimson Kimono*.

Other directors had a comparable, if less raw, aggressiveness. Robert Aldrich built *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) and *Attack!* (1956) out of the hollow dialogue and outrageous sadism of pulp fiction. Don Siegel's police films, along with *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, show a rapid pace learned during his days as an editor at Warners. Like Fuller and Aldrich, Anthony Mann was strongly influenced by Welles, staging fight scenes in great depth and hurling his combatants at the audience. "In the films of these hard-edged directors," wrote critic Manny Farber, "can be found the unheralded ripple of physical experience."²

Some new directors specialized in grotesque comedy. Frank Tashlin, former animator and children's book illustrator, made several imaginative satires on 1950s culture (*The Girl Can't Help It*, 1956; *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*, 1957), as well as directing Jerry Lewis after Lewis split with his comedic partner, Dean Martin.

The oldest practitioners in the years from 1945 to 1960 learned their craft in the silent cinema or the talkies; the postwar newcomers typically started in theater or in the studio system. The youngest generation, who began making films in the mid-1950s, often started in television. John Frankenheimer, Sidney Lumet, Martin Ritt, and Arthur Penn directed live broadcast dramas in New York before turning to feature films. They brought to cinema a "television aesthetic" of big close-ups, constricted sets, deep-focus cinematography, and dialogue-laden scripts. *The Young Stranger* (1957, Frankenheimer), *12 Angry Men* (1957, Lumet), *Edge of the City* (1957, Ritt), and *The Left-Handed Gun* (1958, Penn) exemplified this trend (**15.39**). These directors would be among the first to borrow from European art cinema and the new waves.

Despite the upheavals in the industry, directors from several generations and backgrounds made postwar Hollywood movies a central force again in world cinema. The



15.39 Depth staging for a jury deliberation in *12 Angry Men*.

system had lost economic stability, but the genres and styles of classical filmmaking supplied a framework within which directors could create idiosyncratic, powerful films. The ambitious young filmmakers who came to prominence in Europe in the early 1960s often turned to post-war Hollywood for inspiration.

REFERENCES

1. Sam Arkoff and Richard Trubo, *Flying through Hollywood by the Seat of My Pants* (New York: Birch Lane, 1992), p. 4.
2. Manny Farber, "Underground Films [1957]," in *Negative Space* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), p. 17.

We discuss some topics in this chapter further on our blog, *Observations on Film Art*:
 On flashbacks in 1940s films: "Chinese boxes, Russian dolls, and Hollywood movie"
 On Cinerama: "The wayward charms of Cinerama"
 On David O. Selznick in the 1940s: "A dose of DOS: Trade secrets from Selznick"
 On Chaplin and the crime thriller: "MONSIEUR VERDOUX: Lethal Lothario"